The #1 Computer Game Magazine

Computer Gaming World

JUNE 1996
NO.143

Killer Sound For Your PC
page 74

3-D IS HERE!

Dark Earth—World Exclusive

- Incredible realism
- Amazing combat
- Superb animation

Plus Peeks At 17 NEW 3-D Games

Game of the Year Awards

Blockbuster Reviews

- Civilization II
- Fantasy General
- C&C: Covert Operations
- Terra Nova
- Descent II
- Adv. Tactical Fighters

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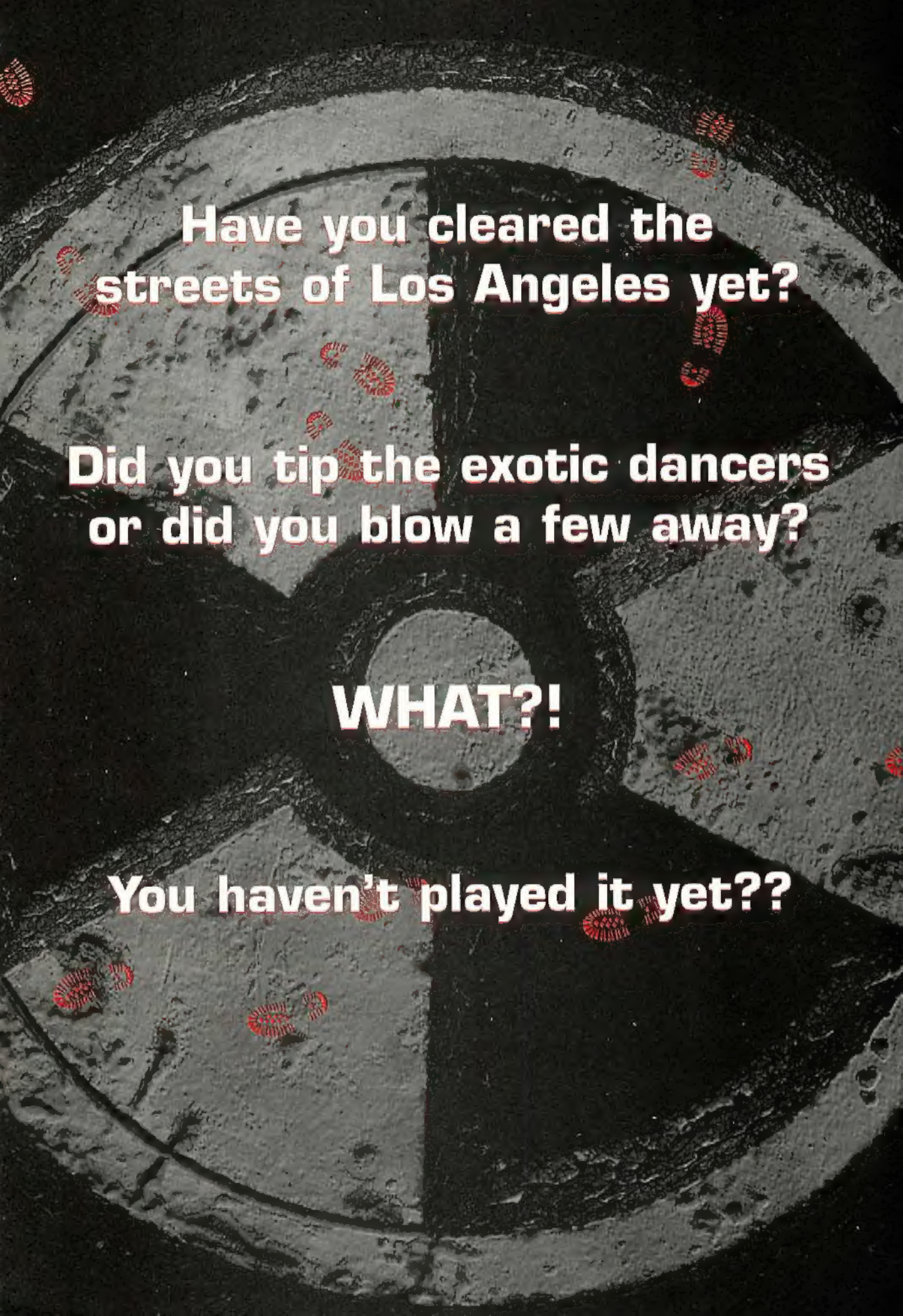
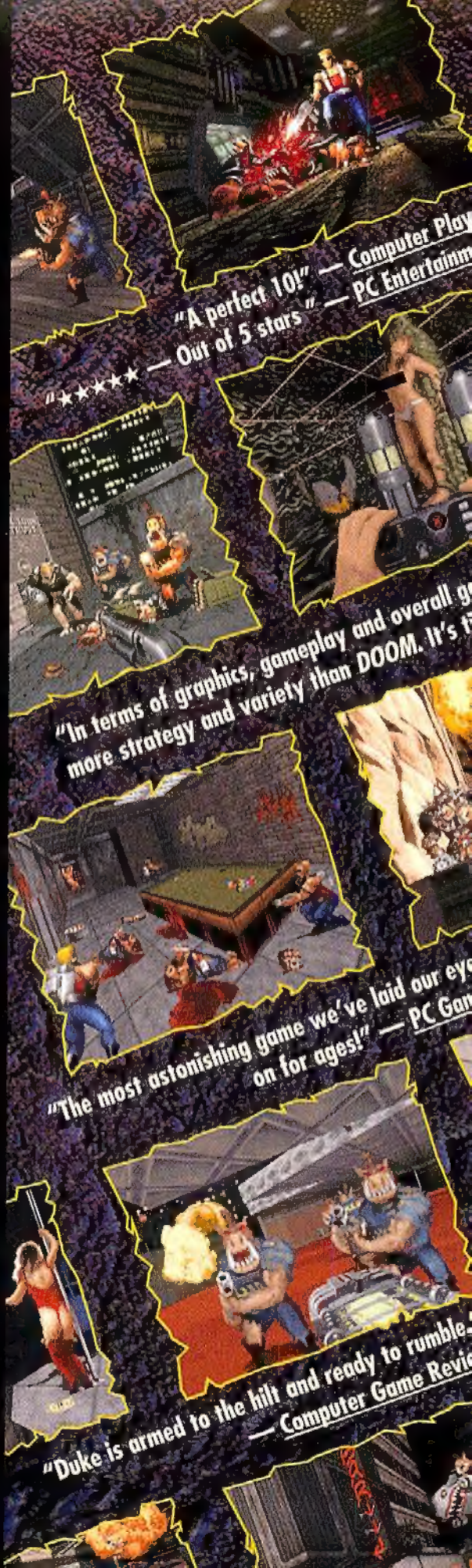

Have you cleared the streets of Los Angeles yet?
Did you tip the exotic dancers or did you blow a few away?
WHAT?!
You haven't played it yet??

Why is Duke Nukem 3D the best?

"Even running in super crisp 800x600 SVGA it blasts along faster than every other comparable 3D PC title. It's not pure speed at the expense of versatility either - it is possible to look up, down, or sideways at any time, with the bitmapped scenery undergoing minimal deformation and no speed loss whatsoever. The engine also caters for full interaction, so bullets leave pock marks on walls, enemy's blood drips down crates and earthquakes cause huge sections to shift altogether, thereby granting access to new locations. It all contributes to the feeling of being encased within a grim world as opposed to wandering through impregnable, static corridors. The effect is hugely rewarding and is surely the direction in which such games should be heading.

This potential has luckily been exploited too. So often games fail to capitalize on excellent technologies but each of **Duke Nukem's** levels are noticeably different, being packed with huge ramps, drops, lifts, jumps and cunningly hidden secret areas. None look the same (indeed there is often a significant variation within a single building) and there is always a feeling that there is a new trick round the next corner. — ***Edge Magazine***"



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Mature Players: Violence and Adult themes

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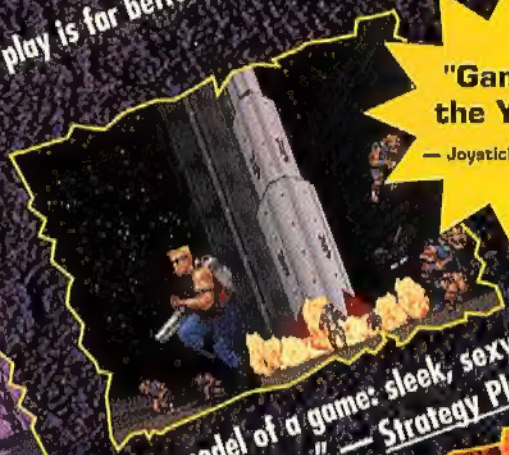
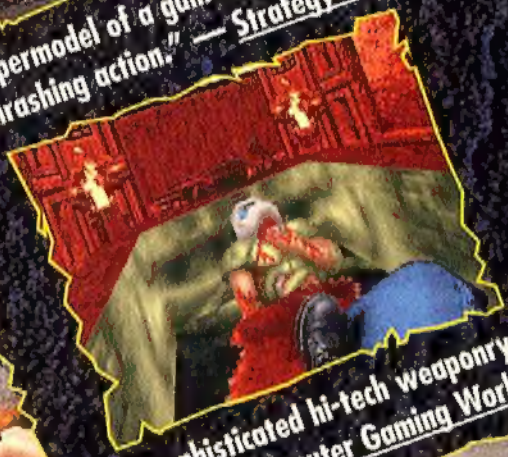
Well, what are you waiting for?

"Game of the Year!"
— Joystick Magazine

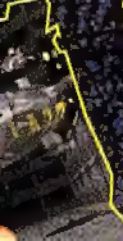
e design, Duke is better than DOOM. The modem/network play is for better and allows
e to make way for the Duke." — Computer Player



"Duke Nukem 3D truly looks like a 3D supermodel of a game: sleek, sexy, and gory with lend-thrashing action." — Strategy Plus



"The BFG was a pop-gun, (it's) got nothing on the sophisticated hi-tech weaponry at Duke Nukem's disposal." — Computer Gaming World



"DOOM is DEAD — long live Duke Nukem 3D, could this be the greatest PC shoot'em-up ever?" — X-GEN

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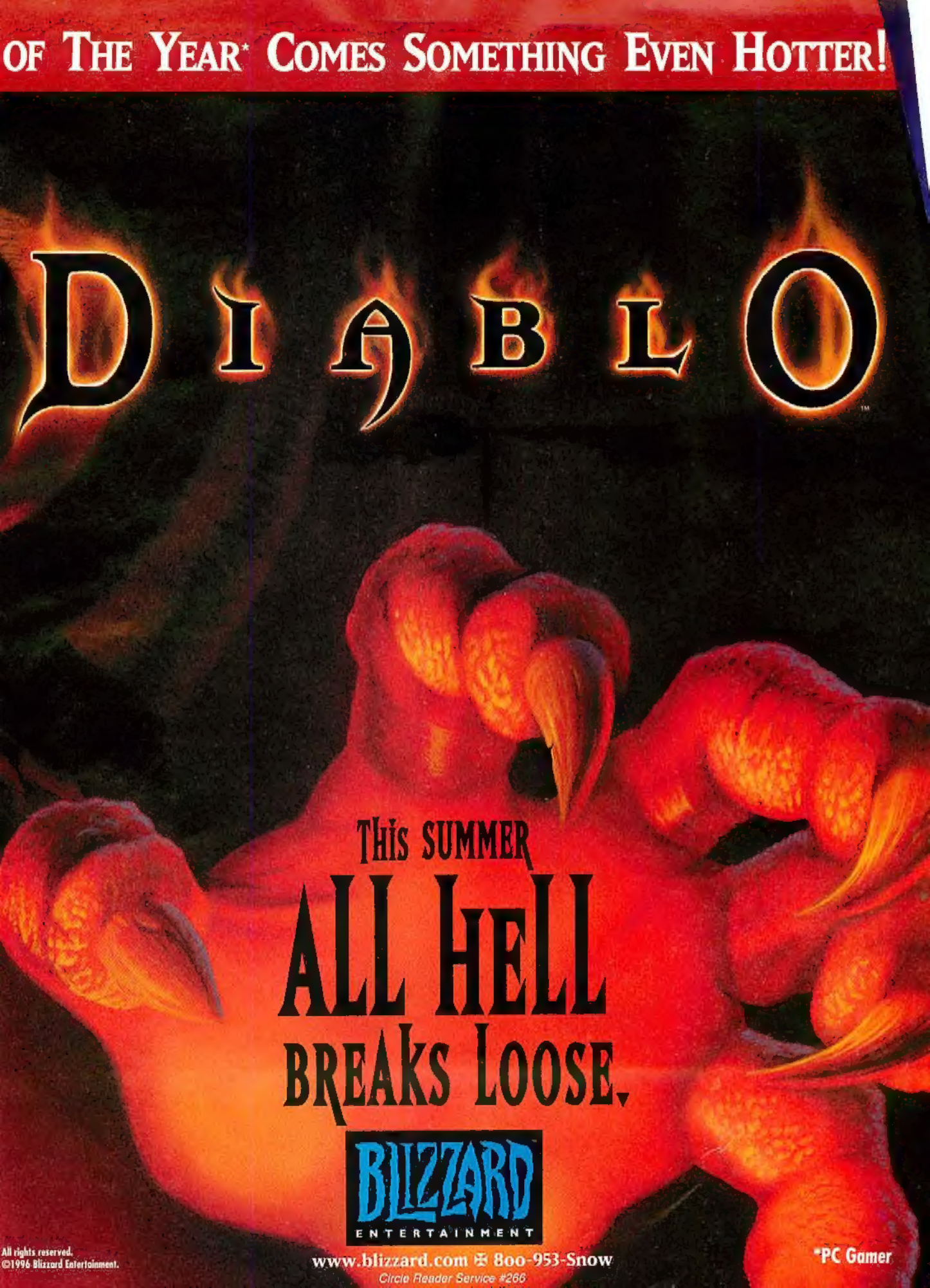
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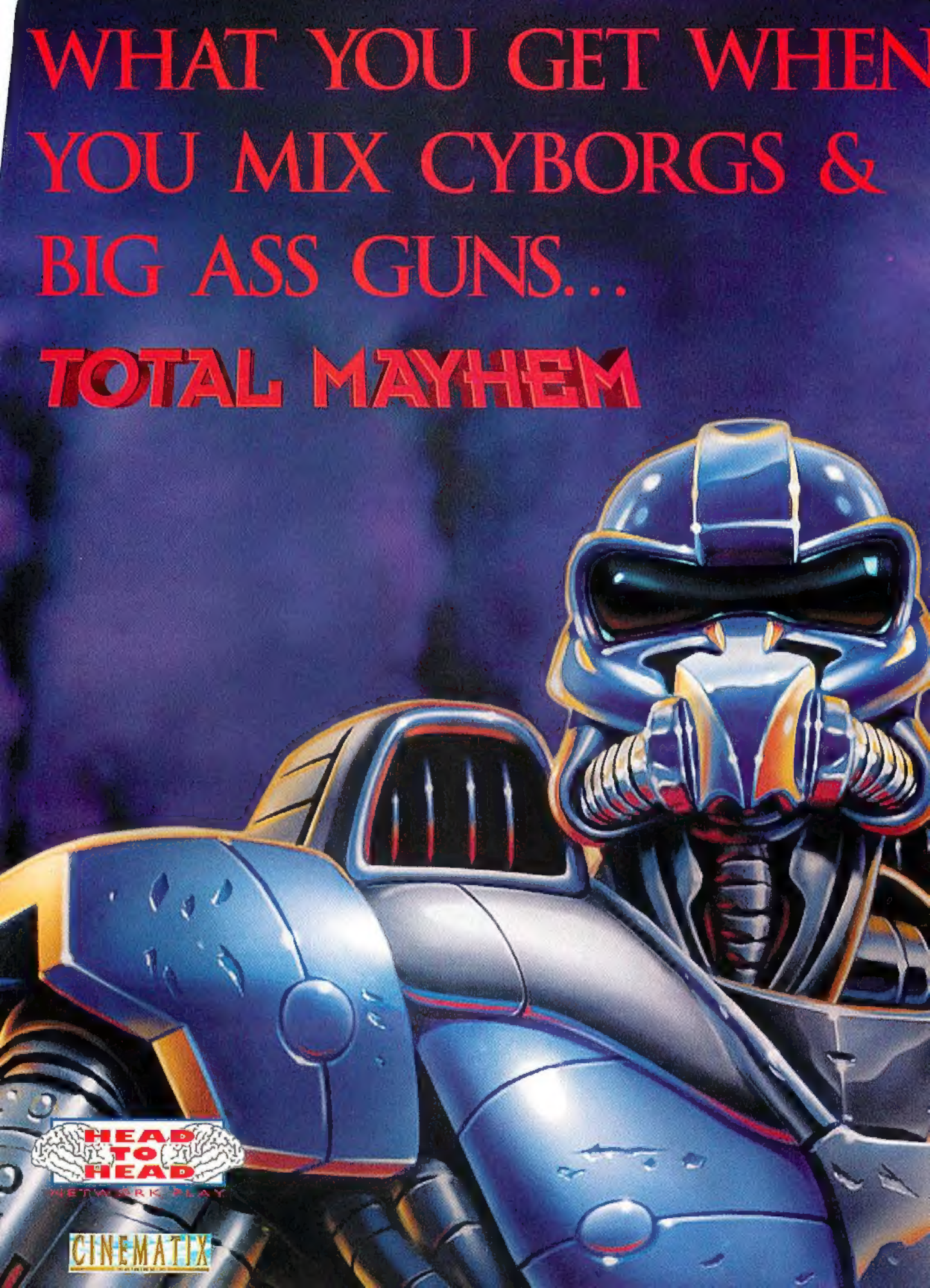
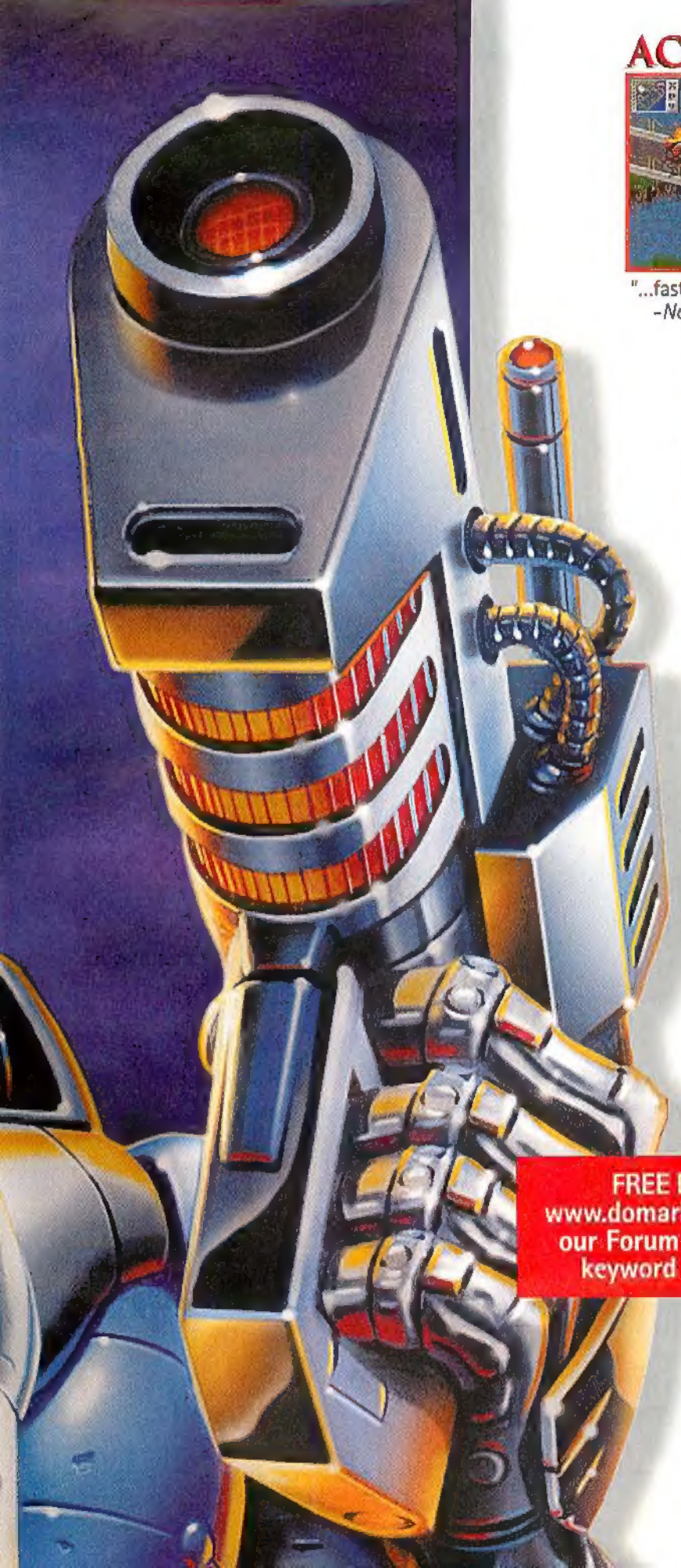
*PC Gamer


WHAT YOU GET WHEN
YOU MIX CYBORGS &
BIG ASS GUNS...
TOTAL MAYHEM
HEAD TO HEAD
NETWORK PLAY
CINEMATIX



ACTION

"...fast-paced, complex and challenging..."
-Next Generation

DESTRUCTION

"It gives the same satisfaction that Crusader: No Remorse did, you basically lay to waste anything and everything around you." *-Strategy Plus*

MULTI-PLAYER

"If you liked Origin's Crusader: No Remorse, and wished it had multi-player support, you're in luck with Total Mayhem." *-PC Entertainment*

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The #1 Computer Game Magazine

Computer Gaming World

ZD

FEATURES

68 Cover Story: 3-D IS HERE!

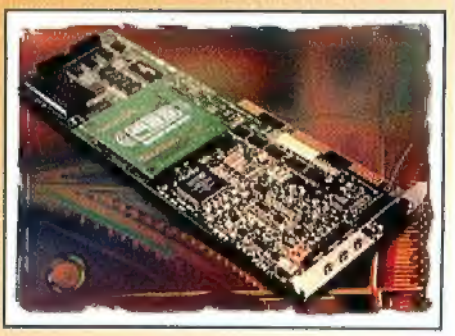
We are on the verge of a coming wave of 3-D titles. Mindscape's DARK EARTH is right at the forefront of the 3-D graphic revolution. Johnny Wilson gives you a world exclusive first look at this stunning new graphic adventure, and offers a glimpse at the 17 3-D titles he saw at the European Consumer Software show in this month's READ.ME (page 32).

55 The CGW Premier Awards

It was a very good year—at least for most genres. Strategy and Wargames were especially strong, with Action not far behind. The trend toward better graphic Adventure games continued this year, and was sadly paralleled by the most lackluster crop of Role-Playing games in recent memory. Well, what are you waiting for? The winners await!

74 Killer Sound From Your PC

Great audio is essential for the most immersive gaming experience. Unfortunately, too many people overlook this critical area and content themselves with FM synthesis or worse. Loyd Case examines Plug & Play sound cards, wavetable synthesis, and the "Sound Blaster" syndrome, and finds that good audio isn't as hard to achieve as *compatibility* with your games.



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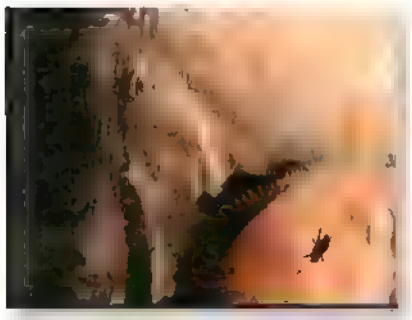

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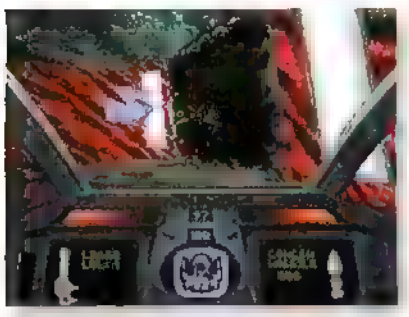

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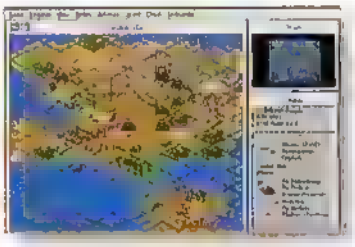

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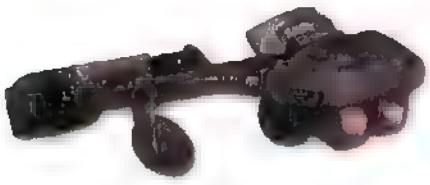

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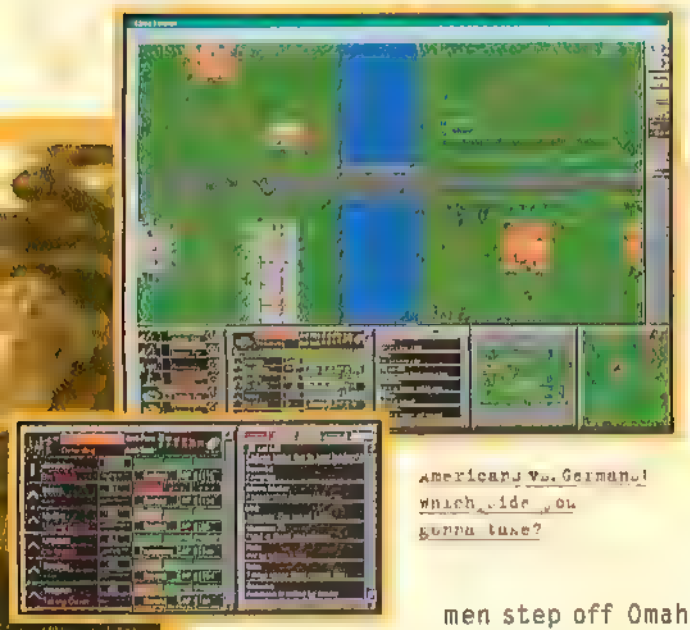
AND ANDERSON, THERE COULD BE A MEDAL IN IT FOR YA.

Anderson, Chuck. Sergeant. Leads 2nd Platoon's Recon team. Probably gotta wife back home. Damn good soldier. You give him an order and he figures out the best way to get the job done. So what's he doing cowering behind that bombed-out farmhouse?

Saving his own butt.

That's what you should expect if you order him to do something crazy. In Close Combat everything reacts like it does on the battlefield, from the ripping canvas hiss of the German MG42 machine gun to the screams of the men it hits. It all goes down right in front of you. In real time.



Americans Vs. Germans! Which side you gonna take?

So there's no time to thumb through the manual. You work your mouse like a weapon. Point and click and boom, the shooting starts the second your men step off Omaha Beach and it don't let up 'til they've taken Saint-Lô. Troops, terrain, situations — if you want to get any more accurate, you'll have to shave your head.

Wanna go head to head with other military geniuses? All you need is a TCP/IP connection. And guts.

Mac® vs. Windows® 95! Which side you gonna take?

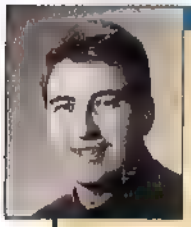
So look alive soldier; D-Day happens this July. Which means you don't have much time to kill.

Microsoft

WHERE DO YOU WANT TO GO TODAY?

CREDITS

Dave Salvator comes to *CGW* from Ziff Davis Labs (ZDL) where he was in charge of multimedia technology (MMT) test methodology development (TMD). In other words, he found new and diabolical ways to break audio and video hardware (AVH) and helped Ziff magazines inform the consumer (YOU). Dave reviews hardware and emerging technologies (HET) and evaluates new support technologies (NSTs) such as Applications Programming Interfaces (APIs) and powerful new chips (BFCs) that make games more compelling. In addition to being the king of three letter acronym (TLAs) speech, Dave has been an avid musician for 20 years, playing the saxophone (SAX) and keyboards (PNO), and plays out regularly on Jazz and R&B (RNB) gigs. BTW (By the way), his other interests include sailing, bicycling and finding new projectile applications for rubber chickens.



Dennis McCauley has been gaming since the Mets were still considered "amazin'." He started out with table-top sports and war simulations, and made the jump to computer gaming back in the 8-bit days with an Apple IIe. Five PCs later, he's still twisting joysticks and rolling trackballs way past bedtime. By nature a digital warrior drawn to games of strategy and conquest, the kinder, gentler Dennis of these days has undertaken the ultimate of endurance sports—raising children. Now he's just as happy sharing an edutainment title or playing putt-putt golf with his three small children as he is behind the monitor coaching a basketball sim. Taking over as *CG*s new sports games columnist, McCauley will bring sports enthusiasts the play-by-play—until the fat lady sings.

Loyd Case is the modern equivalent of the guy who spent endless hours in his garage tinkering with his '49 Plymouth. After receiving an advanced degree in Physical Chemistry, he ended up in the computer biz and never looked back. He first started playing with Avalon Hill's classic board game, Blitz-krieg, and is still an avid strategy gamer today. The IBM version of Zork was his first computer game. In addition to being *CG*'s Contributing Technology Editor, Case is a regular guy with a wife, kids and a job, but he harbors a secret desire to write potboiler novels.

Kevin Turner, is a former submariner, former DSRV crewman, and former Navy diver, which seems fairly ironic for a man who lives in the heart of California's desert—lovely Fresno, CA. After a decade of Naval service, Kevin gave up picking the lint out of his bellybutton to become a paramedic. (His parents are still waiting for him to grow up.) A quiet loner who enjoys stalking, mayhem, and Satan worship, Kevin insists that he is simply, "misunderstood." At times known to suffer delusions of grandeur, he insists he was the figure on the grassy knoll during the Kennedy assassination, and is now the current graphic designer and webmaster for Cyber City. Kevin's *CGW* debut was in July of 1991, and since then he has written several reviews on, you guessed it, submarine simulations. When not behind a computer, Kevin enjoys hockey, reading, and photography.

The #1 Computer Game Magazine

Computer Gaming World

CG 143 JUNE 1996

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Jonathan Lane

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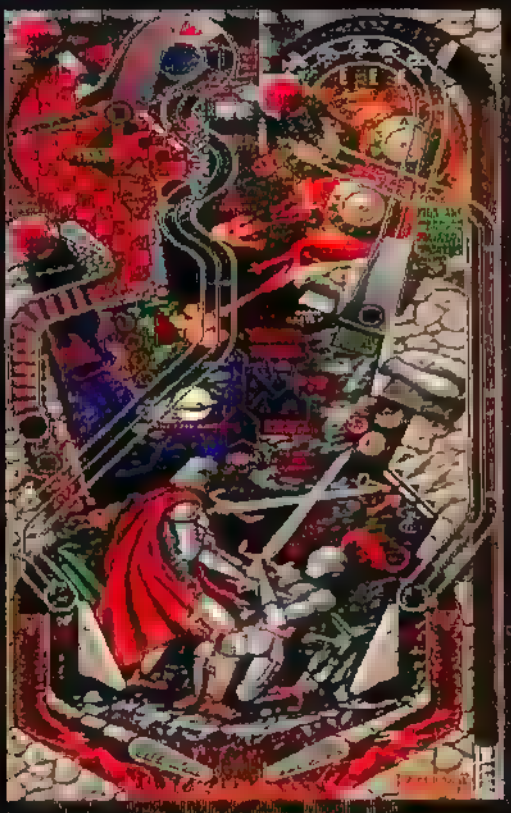

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Who's on first? What's on the silver disc I had to pay extra for? Why can't I make enough money to cover my expenses? You've got questions, we've got answers.

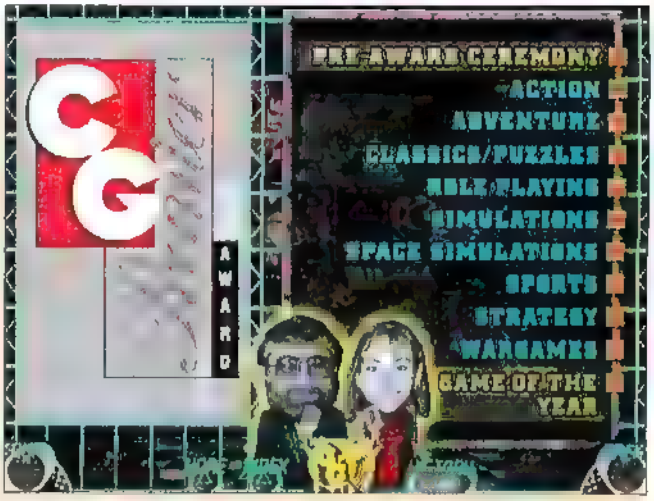
What's On The CD?

The best games of 1995 are featured in this month's CG ROM. Our editors present the *CGW* Premier Award to outstanding titles in each of nine genres, with special awards for Technical Achievement, Artistic Achievement, Hardware, and—the ultimate award—Game of the Year. Over 30 companies are represented and more than 40 titles are featured in the CD, several of which have demos, exclusive walkthroughs and scenarios created just for the CG reader.

In addition to our comprehensive 1995 collection of exceptional games, we have some amazing interactive demos. Our Editors' Hot Picks this month include the full shareware version of DUKE NUKEM 3D by 3D Realms, courtesy of

FormGen, AFTERLIFE by LucasArts, BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG by Talonsoft, and, SMART GAMES CHALLENGE #1, a Mensa level puzzle game by newcomer Smart Games. And for all those who were disappointed by the removal of HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC from our March CG-ROM, well... we've got it this time.

Our product demos highlights this



month are: Domark's BIG RED RACING, ASSAULT RIGS by Sony Interactive, STRIFE by Velocity, and TERRA NOVA by Looking Glass Technologies. (The review of TERRA NOVA is on page 130.) Other demos include CHAOS OVERLORDS by New World Computing, and BRUCE JENNER'S WORLD CLASS DECATHLON by Interactive Magic.

How Do I Use It?

Our CD is a Windows program. If you have Windows 95, installation is simple: the CD is Autoplay enabled. Just "Lock 'n' load." Otherwise, from Windows 3.x, pop the CD into your drive, select RUN from the Program Manager's menu and type D:\RUN ME (where D is the letter of your CD ROM drive) to run it straight from the CD. Then type D:\INSTALL to create a *CGW* program group on your Windows desktop. If you have installed previous versions of the CG ROM, this disk will use the program group already on your desktop. Point and click to navigate around the CD, just as you would in any other Windows program. You can access any of the "Main Attraction" items (such as Product Demos or Patches) from within the Primary Blunders "Surprise Attraction." And you may exit the "Surprise Attraction" at any time by first clicking on the "Back" button, then clicking on the "Home" button.

How Do I Access The Demos?

To view the demos, first click on EDITORS' HOT PICKS or PRODUCT DEMOS. Next, click on your favorite genre: Action, Adventure/Role Playing or Strategy/Wargames, then click on the title of your interest. Each demo has instructions for its installation.

How Do I Get The Patch Files?

Click on PATCHES under the CGW FEATURES and then read the text window with instructions on copying the files to your hard drive. You also may access the patches from your DOS prompt by typing D:\PATCHES (where D: is the letter of your CD-ROM drive) and copy them directly from there to your hard drive.

How Do I Get The CG-ROM?

Newsstand issues come in two varieties, some with and some without the CD. Each type is clearly

Spies like us.

"Where has this been all my life?"
— William Webster
Former Director of the C.I.A.

"Like breaking into CIA headquarters and spending the night trying out all the toys. Grade: A"
— Bob Strauss, Entertainment Weekly

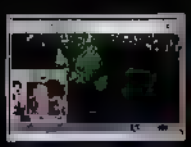
"A riveting post-Cold War thriller."
— Shane Mooney, PC Entertainment

"One of the most technologically impressive games of 1996."
— Chris Charla, Next Generation

"SPYCRAFT is like nothing else you have tried. I whole-heartedly recommend it."
— Steve Bauman,
Computer Games Strategy Plus

"One of the most ambitious and riveting PC games of its genre ever produced."
— William Trotter, PC Gamer

"A fascinating espionage adventure — and truly a great game."
— Scott Golen, Computer Games Strategy



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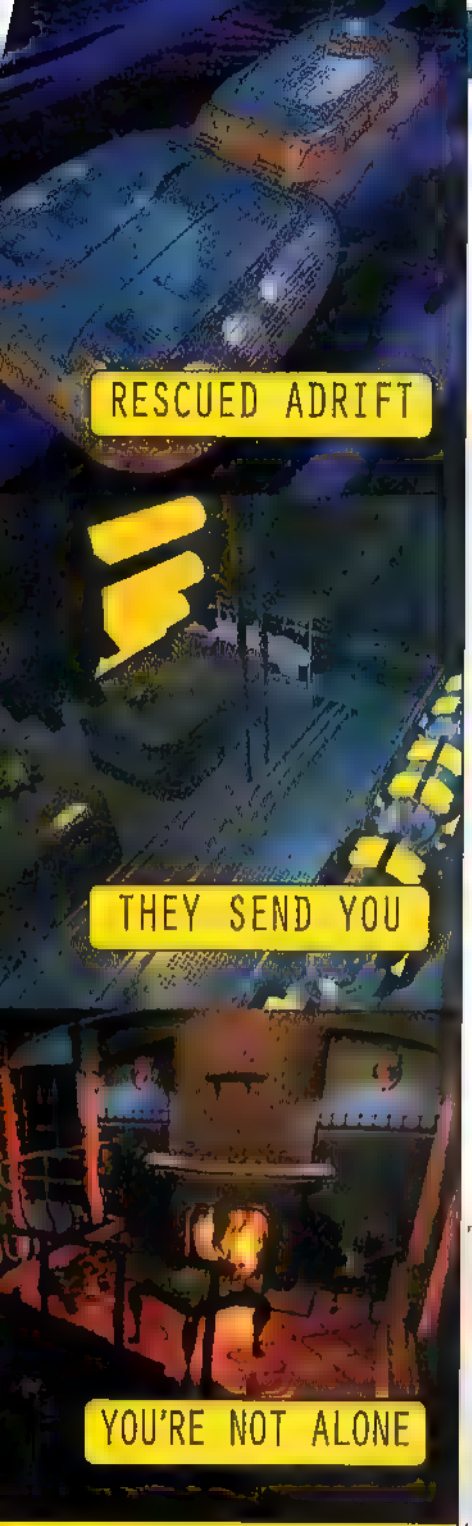
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How Do We Classify Games?

Action/Arcade (AC): The emphasis is on hand-eye coordination and reflexes, usually emphasizing fast play over story or strategy.

Adventure (AD): Games wherein you control an alter ego and move through a storyline or sequence of events, where puzzle-solving takes precedence over conversation and combat.

Classics/Puzzles (CP): Classics are old stand-bys and parlor games that appeal to many different types of gamer. Examples include: backgammon, bridge, chess, MONOPOLY, parchesi, RISK, and SOLITAIRE. Puzzle games are computer games which emphasize spatial relationships, word games and/or problem-solving without requiring gamers to follow a storyline. Examples would be: SHANGHAI, TETRIS and ZIG-ZAG.

Role-Playing (RP): RPGs are a subset of adventure games, but stress character development, often through improving stats or other attributes. Conversations with non-player characters (NPCs) and tactical combat are generally more important than in Adventure games. Finally, the game world tends to be large, and the plot less linear, often with some quests/treks outside the main storyline.

Simulations (SI): Highly realistic games from a first-person perspective: you may drive a realistically simulated race car, fly a military aircraft with a meticulous physics model, or swoop through a detailed sci-fi environment. Usually polygon-filled technology is used to build the simulated world on the fly.

Sports (SP): The sports game category is a broad genre which includes action (NBA Live) and strategy games (FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO) based on sports.

Strategy (ST). Problem-solving, short- and long range planning are the keys here. These games almost always emphasize resource and risk management. This genre includes conflict-based sci-fi and fantasy games (X-COM, OUTPOST, MOO), as well as "pure" strategy games and "software toys" such as SIMCITY.

Wargames (WG): A subset of strategy games, these recreate historical conflicts from a command perspective. They may be tactical, operational, or strategic, and stress anything from logistics and firepower to morale and leadership. They may be simple (PANZER GENERAL, EMPIRE II) to incredibly detailed and complex (PACIFIC WAR)

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Outstanding: The rare game that gets it all right. The graphics, sound, and gameplay come together to form a Transcendent Gaming Experience. Our strongest buying recommendation.

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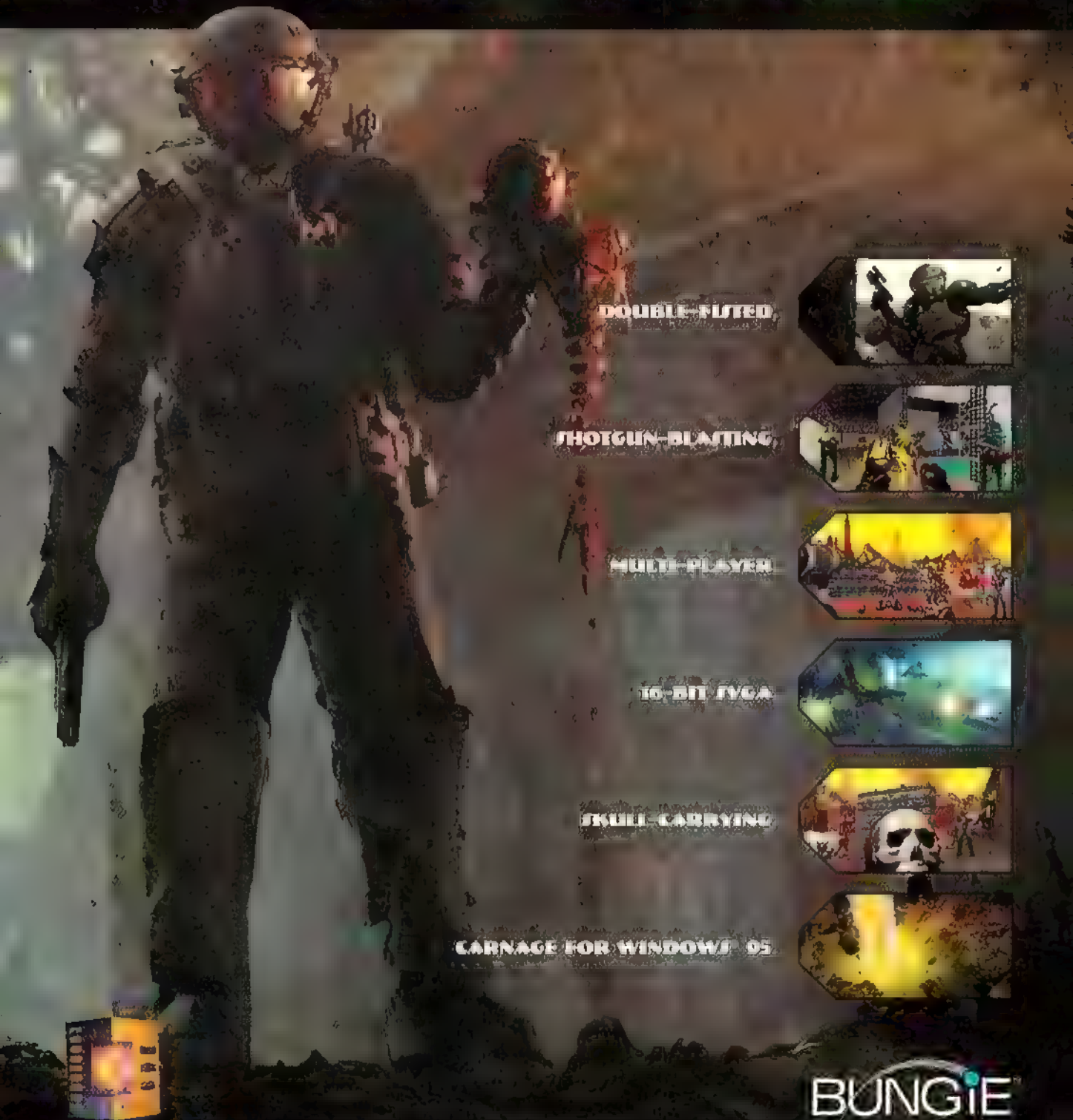
Average: A mixed bag. Can be a game that reaches for the stars but falls short in significant areas. Can also be a game that does what it does well, but lacks flair or originality.

Weak: A game with serious problems. Usually buggy, seriously lacking in play value, or just a poorly conceived game design—and you will want to think long and hard before buying it.

Abysmal: The rare game that gets it all wrong. This is reserved for those products so buggy, incomplete or valueless that you wonder why they were ever released.

MARATHON 2

DURANDAL



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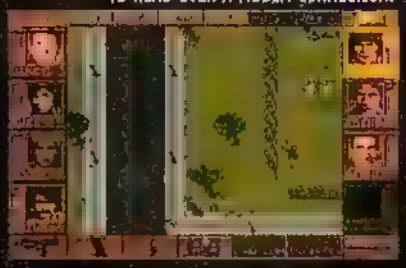

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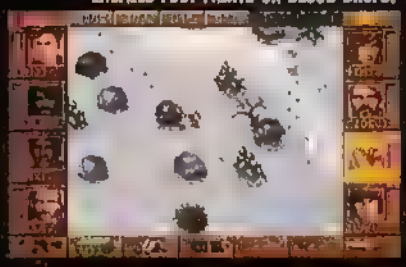

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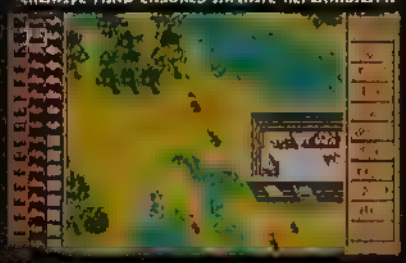

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Circle Reader Service #162

The Source Of Frustration

Why You Can't Always Find The Game You Want

Ever wonder why your local retailer carries some games, but not others? Ever wonder what criteria are used to decide what games reach store shelves? Ever feel like there is a mad conspiracy at large to keep you from finding the game you want? Well, you aren't the only one. We sometimes ask the same questions. Better yet, since our vantage point gives us a few answers, we thought we'd try to demystify some of the voodoo

First, retailers only want to handle a game for two reasons: 1) it makes good marketing sense or 2) they are subsidized enough that it makes its own kind of marketing sense. Under the first rationale, retailers talk in terms of margin and turns. Margin is their percentage profit comparing the price the game costs them versus the price they will sell it and correlating this profit to the amount of square feet of shelf space they commit to the product. Turns are the number of sales they will get on each bit of shelf space. The term is short for turnover. Obviously, a higher number of turns equals a higher rate of profit and success.

> "Many stores don't carry products from companies that won't buy space in their catalogs or pay for promotional programs."

In most cases, the profit margin on computer games is insufficient to justify shelf space under rationale #1, so the retailer accepts the product under rationale #2. Rationale #2 is called MDF, which stands for Marketing Development Funds. These are the fees that computer game publishers pay to retailers in the form of: 1) costs of building special shelves; 2) charges for special signs or shelf lineage; 3) rates for cooperative advertising (both in the retail chain's own catalogs and in coop newspaper advertisements); 4) promotional charges for end caps (the displays at the ends of the shelves) and POPs (Point of Purchase displays—those special boxes and signs near the cash register), and more.

As a consumer, you need to realize that many retail stores will not carry products that are not advertised in their catalogs or are not part of a promotional program from which the stores glean extra money. The decision to carry or not to carry a product in a given store may have nothing to do with the quality of the product.

Second, individual store managers in a retail chain rarely get to make their own decisions. Corporate buyers who, at best, may see a demo of the flash and sizzle of a game at a trade show and, at worst, make their decision over a sales sheet and an MDF contract, decide which titles they'll carry, and managers pretty well have to stick to that approved list. This makes it

---

The dynamic world of computer gaming is on the verge of a 3-D revolution unprecedented in the history of the hobby. The 3-D revolution shouldn't be confused with what are presently considered "3-D games" like DOOM II and DUKE NUKEM 3D, where the player navigates in a first-person environment, seeing through the "eyes" of his on-screen persona. Rather, this 3-D revolution entails new software that renders characters as true 3-D objects, not just flat, texture-mapped characters common in present-day titles, and these 3-D games are not limited to the first-person perspective of conventional "3-D" games (confused yet?). The 3-D revolution also applies to hardware, particularly graphic accelerators, which help crunch all the data to paint those 3-D rendered objects quickly on a home computer.

This month's cover story is but a glimpse into the stunning, atmospheric 3-D games in development. Of course, we'll cover more of the titles as soon as we can see and play them. But the software is only half of the story.

As computer gamers, you are probably accustomed to the endless onslaught of technology advances which often necessitate upgrades. And upgrades are exactly what will be in store for you if you don't have a fire-breathing Pentium 150 and you want to play these compelling new games.

That's why we're working on a major feature for next month that examines the technology and explains the issues involved. We'll look at the first wave of graphic accelerators and accelerator chips which are, in most cases, making their way to market now. So if you've been confused by all the talk about "500,000 goraud-shaded, z-buffered, bit mapped, tri-linear filtered polygons per second," and you're waiting to see somebody seriously examine what 3-D hardware will do, and who's making the best stuff for your purposes, be sure to tune in next month for an enlightening article and some real-world answers.

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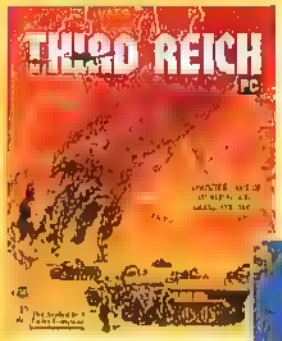

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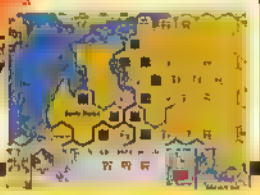

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Circle Reader Service #168

tough for great titles from new companies to get consideration.

Third, it is now a fad in the retail chains to stock games in slimmer quantities. This means that if the stores expect a game to sell 10 units per month, they're only ordering five units at a time and counting on the reorder in two weeks. On a hot-selling game, this may mean that they sell out on the first weekend and the shelf sits empty for 10 days before the reorder gets there. The retailers have been burned by heavy returns from a few bad games and they don't want the inventory clogging up their channel. So, they're stocking lighter.

Low inventories in the stores means that there is less likelihood of heavy returns and protects the industry against another crash like that in the mid-'80s. The bad news is that each title may not sell as many units as possible before the retailer uses that space for something else, even if it is selling out. More importantly for you, you may not get to buy that game as soon as you wanted to. You might even miss it all together.

Another factor of bad news is that most distributors pay (when they pay) on a net 90 basis (i.e. they have 90 days to pay after accepting delivery, ostensibly to cover their returns liability). How many distributors do you think pay before that 90 days are up? None. So, if retailers are ordering smaller quantities and waiting to reorder, what do you suppose is happening to orders from distributors? Right, they're getting smaller. So, what happens to the publisher who is waiting to get revenue to pay for the development of that product? He's stuck. The smaller orders mean that it takes longer to recoup the development budget. Where once the distributor would order large quantities of product and be liable net 90, now they order small quantities and reorder as needed. New game development is often the victim.

Fourth, there is a new marketing procedure called Single Source Marketing. In the computer game business, it began with GT Interactive. This company, best-known for putting together the marketing and distribution deal for id's DOOM "shareware at retail" packages, put together a deal to go into WalMart. This was the holy grail for most of the industry. If they could get into WalMart, they would be mass market at last. The catch was that WalMart didn't want to have to deal with the sales reps of a lot of different distributors or companies. They wanted one source for everything. GT stepped into that void and opened up WalMart as an extensive source of revenue. Of course, everyone in WalMart has to allow GT to take a piece of the action for being that single source. Then, Electronic Arts made the same kind of deal with Toys-R-Us. If any computer game publisher wants to be in Toys-R-Us, they have to allow EA to take a piece of the action for being that source.

Well, that's extra money for whatever company gets to be the single source serving these large chains, but it also means that publishers have to fund their competitors or get out of certain markets. If you can't find your favorite games from a given publisher in a retail store, it may be because the publisher of those games doesn't want to enter into a distribution deal with that source.

Why can't you find the games you want in a given store? There are lots of reasons from basic marketing through lazy corporate buyers. What can you do about it? Voice your feelings. Let your local store know that you're frustrated with the selection. Ask them which one of the four problems listed above is the one keeping them from having the game in stock. The bottom line is that informed customers can change things. You can help retailers stock better games.

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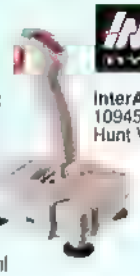

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

WING SCAM-PANDER

Regarding Martin Cirulis' column in the February issue, thank you on behalf of us all for asking where the documentation went. I've been increasingly annoyed at this latest scam where the game publishers want to charge us $60 for a game, and then get an extra $20 for the information we need to play it. Way to sinner you didn't mention Origin and WING COMMANDER IV. They spent millions on this game but only gave us minimal information on the ships and weapons. The manual tells you to check the README.TXT file. The README.TXT doesn't contain any information at all about ships or weapons.

Checking Origin's web site, I found some minimal information on fighters, but none of the other data. When I e-mailed them, they said they were working on it, and it would be posted soon. The game was already out, and the strategy guide was already in print. Obviously, they already had this data, so why didn't they give it to us?

This type of tactic is really nothing less than the gouging of the consumer, and I hope Origin and the others were reading your column. Bravo.

Thomas Zadlo
Lansdale, PA

As consumers, we feel the same way. As gamers, we simply must ask the question, does the publisher have the responsibility to give you enough information to make sure you beat the game? There is a big difference between giving you enough information to play the game and giving you all the information necessary to win the game.

NUKE'M TILL THEY GLOW

Lane Denson's letter in the April issue seemed to hit a nerve. We were so intrigued by your letters that we are printing a representative sampling of them here.

IN THIS CORNER ...

In response to a letter by Lane Denson in your April 96 issue about DUKE NUKEM, and the use of strippers in the second level bar, your reply touched on a few reasons why they [the strippers] were put into the game. I feel the reason behind the whole civilian interaction only adds to the game.

It takes great marksmanship to hit all the aliens in the bar, and not hit the dancers. Police officers are trained in this same manner. I don't think the women are in the game just for the enjoyment of gamers to kill women. It is the same as SWAT where you are trained to hit the targets but not the civilian targets. You can also see this...by the word spoken by Duke after hitting and killing a stripper, "Damn!"

Jamie Lang
Coronation, Alberta

I think what Lane forgot to realize is that this is purely fantasy. I am 33 and have my own computer software business. I consider myself to be quite "normal" according to society's standards. I find that shooting and blowing up allows me to release some frustration. We need more games like DUKE 3D. It is very well done and is worthy of "Software Game of the Year."

The fact that there are showgirls on the second level of the shareware version just goes to show how far we've come in computer games. I personally don't shoot 'em. I allow them to live on to dance forever. It should be the player's decision weather they live or die. Remember...purely fantasy.

No matter what happens in the world there's always some group or individual who has nothing better to do with their time than to try to censor what others say or do. Let's remember the constitution. Let's remember our rights! I strongly recommend DUKE NUKEM 3D and I say "LET THE STRIPPERS LIVE!"

Edward Crawford
via the Internet

I have worked in the industry for the last seven years and have seen many games come and go. One common thread among gamers is that the majority of [them] are limited in their realities. I believe what hooks a gamer is the gamer's perception that the game is its own world. The moment that a game does something that defies reason or logic the gamer is reminded that this is "unrealistic, and calculated" thus taking away some of the enjoyment of the experience. By making everything within the game "Live," the gamer is immersed in the "world." The style of the game is very much in line with the type of characters that are in it. This is a post-nuclear wasteland where evil has taken over. You can shoot and kick anything in the game and leave some kind of marking (or destroy it all together). This is something that was lacking in games of the past (DOOM and the clones).

I completely agree that violence against humans in real life is deplorable and, unfortunately, far too frequent. Whether it be against men or women, it should not be condoned in society. But I am unable to see the relation between TV and real life or computer games and real life. If someone actually feels that what happens on TV or on their computer screen is somehow a right or justification for it to happen in real life they are somewhat off center to begin with.

Remember when WOLFENSTEIN 3D came out a similar uproar was raised about the killing of Nazis. It takes an up and coming, uncompromising group of programmers and artists to push the computing envelope, and it looks like Apogee is taking the next step, not unlike those before them back in 89 did.

Jamie Leece
via the Internet

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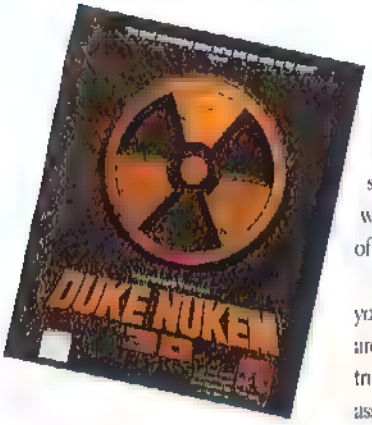

I just read the message from "Lane Denson, MTSU" in the April issue. Was that an April fools joke? How did this loser discover that shooting the strippers in DUKE NUKEM 3D kills them? Hmm?

I expected some whining to come from right-wing moralists, but the disdain he shows for parents and parental responsibility as guardians of their children is typical knee-jerk big government liberalism at its best. What would make him happy? A DUKE NUKEM 3D decency law banning this licentious work?

Every company should do as 3D Realms has and allow parental control over content, simply because it's good business. That doesn't mean that they should stop producing PC-incorrect games. The answer in this information age is *not* censorship, but personal and parental choice and control.

Gary Bringhurst
via the Internet

AND IN THIS CORNER ...

While I agree with your response to Lane Densons letter in CGW #1, concerning the very impressive game play of DUKE NUKEM 3D, I am afraid that this assessment might have clouded your judgment about the issue with the strippers ... With the inclusion of the strippers, that can be shot and killed, the game has undeniably crossed the line from senseless to nasty violence.

You argue that the game wouldn't be realistic if the strippers couldn't be killed. True enough, but how realistic is it that these very strippers continue their dance, whilst you shoot it out with a bunch of alien monsters.

Be that as it may, my beef is with your response to Lane's letter. You are trying to justify something that is truly inexcusable in order, I have to assume, to make your point about the exciting game play of DN3D. Even somebody with a very distorted set of values would at least have to admit that the inclusion of the stripper element is of very questionable taste.

Sven Nebelung
New York, NY

I think you are correct in saying that game play is why DUKE NUKEM 3D is such a great game. I have to bring up a point, though. For most people, the scenes depicted in DUKE NUKEM 3D are just images in a game. There are two groups that come to mind where these images are more than that, Children and the Mentally unstable.

Children do not understand that the images of sex & violence that you see on TV or computer games are not real. I have a 12 year old stepdaughter and I preview any material she uses on the computer, but I think that most people don't take the time to see what their children's games involve. I have seen many kids in the arcade finish playing MORTAL KOMBAT 3 and then, proceed to karate chop each other into pieces. These kids don't understand that these are games. The rising violence level in kids is definitely due to the amount of violence that they are exposed to on a daily basis. The other side is the people who skirt the fringe of society. Now, these people would probably strike without any external influences, but these images can't help.

I play these games and enjoy them. I have oohed and aahed at demons flying apart from a well-placed rocket, but then again, as Lane pointed out, demons are fairy-tales. I don't want to see a Jessie Helms type approach to these games, but I think that there has to be some self-imposed limits to violence in general. Good taste (if any can be claimed by a shoot-em-up) should be used. Violence has a place, but it should not be as extreme as Duke.

Patrick Dugan
Charlotte, NC

NOTABLE QUOTES

Okay, if you're tired of hearing about the Duke debate, here's a smattering of random ramblings from our mailbag.

Where was Steel Panthers when I was single?

Todd G.
Fort Wayne, IN

Whatever happened to "Once Upon A Time" (the page in CGW that showed 5- and 10-year old games)?

Ben Esau ove
Wimberley, TX

We dumped it five or ten years ago.

Computer games and software were always a point of interest for me. But until *Computer Gaming Monthly* came along, I haven't been able to get into it very much. Thanks, CGM!

Evan Sanbal
Aurora, CO

Uh, you're welcome! Now about that eye exam you've been putting off.

Why haven't you reviewed BATTLECRUISER 3000?

Jeff Land
Mountain View, CA

Probably because it hasn't come out yet.

WHERE IS THE NOTABLE QUOTES SECTION? I'm (unfortunately) cancelling my subscription renewal because I hate the new format.

Greg
Brookfield, CT

The Publisher asked us to wait until you were gone before putting your quote in.

The people at Origin (sic) are damn fools to think they'd profit off WC5 after launching stuff in space.

Quinn Henning
Orlando, FL

You're damn right! They would be if they thought that, but you better go back and take another look at that reference to "The Pool" at the end of the April news story. Don't feel badly, you're not the only one who was snookered. Good luck getting that egg off, though.

ADDRESSING

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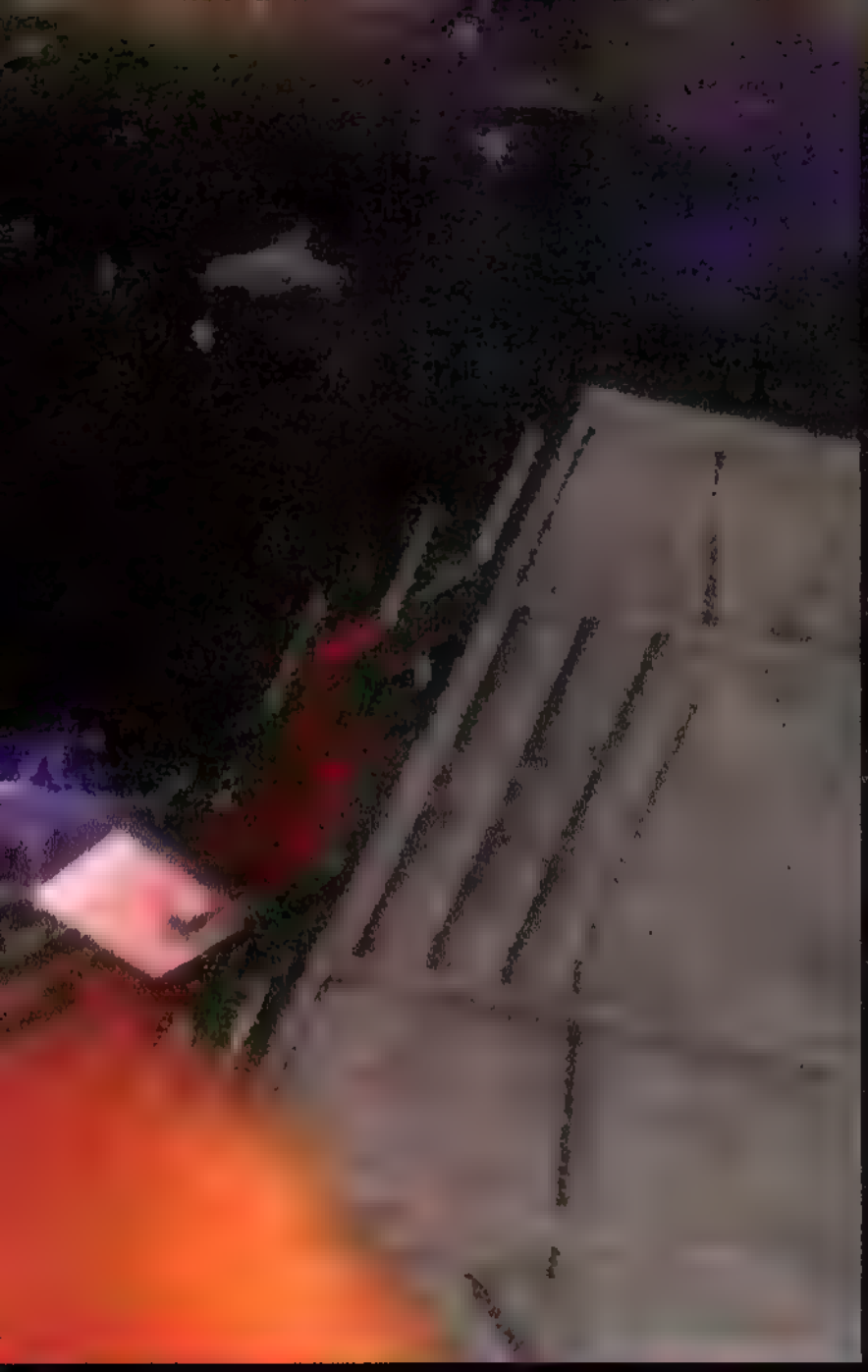

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Circle Reader Service #146

The 3-D Wave In Europe

Huge Emphasis On 3-D At Euro Show Previews U.S. Releases

In and around ECTS, Europe's major exhibition for "leisure software," insiders were treated to a preview of '96 and beyond. As in the U.S., the watchword was 3-D, but *vive l'difference!* Europe's commitment to 3-D is significantly greater than that in the U.S. Here, we're still settling for relatively low-res two-and-a-half dimensional solutions where the illusion of 3-D is important. In Europe, developers are working on authentic 3-D solutions that combine high-res textures and fast performance. Here are some of the highlights of what we saw in and around ECTS, and what you can expect to see at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in the U.S.

An unsightly entrance to the Grand Olympia Exhibition Hall belies the up-to-date wares inside.

Europe has its share of relatively slow, but showy, 3-D titles. SHADOWS OVER RIVA (the third REALMS OF ARKANIA RPG to be published in the U.S. by Sir-Tech) opens with a traditional, albeit sometimes gross, 3-D animation and LORDS OF THE REALM II (a medieval strategy game from Sierra's Impressions subsidiary) opens with a very fluid scene-setting animation. Yet, this is not where the 3-D becomes impressive. The 3-D becomes impressive in games like Psygnosis' ECSTATICA 2. The characters are much more detailed than in its cult favorite predecessor, and the terrain features have enough depth that you can look over cliff edges and castle sides, as well as fall down wells and out windows. Despite this enhancement, the game plays faster than ever and features moves common to the best fighting games (dodging side-rolls, back flips, forward rolls, kicks, slashes, and special moves). Mindscape's DARK EARTH (see cover story) also features impressive fighting sequences. Add Psygnosis' ATHANOR to the stew and you have exciting potential. ATHANOR requires you to learn 15 different styles of fighting in a game where every frame is high-res 3-D, shadows are important clues, and the stereo sound provides important cues.

Other 3-D adventures will include Philips Media's DOWN IN THE DUMPS, a wild little adventure about characters who live in a literal dump; as well as Viacom's JOE'S APARTMENT, a roach-infested adventure based on the MTV series (this one's being developed in the U.S.) and AEON FLUX, based on the dark, animated heroine of MTV fame. Viacom is also developing SNOW CRASH, a mission-based action adventure created around the cyberpunk novel by Neal Stephenson.

Psygnosis' ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU uses amazing technology to bring to life the island from the H. G. Wells novel, while the company's CITY OF LOST CHILDREN is a marvelous implementation of the acclaimed French film by Marc Cato. Psygnosis is also developing DISCWORLD 3-D, a '97 project which manages to continue the artistic feel of the earlier DISCWORLD and the new animated DISCWORLD 2 scheduled for this year.

In the action realm, 3-D games run the gamut from Activision's BLAST CHAMBER to Philips' Q.A.D. (QUINTESSENTIAL ART OF DESTRUCTION). The former is a fresh multiplayer concept where four competitors have time bombs strapped to them. They move throughout a 3-D environment (which can, in turn, be moved) and chase crystals which can either elongate the amount of time on their timer or attenuate the amount of time on their opponents' timers. The latter is a flying shoot-'em-up with a very "3-D STUDIO" look. Add Team47 GOMAN and GOTHIQUE to the ros-

ON THE SHELF

Here are some of the hottest products on the market, as well as the ones that frankly ain't so hot. Reviews for most are coming soon.

PSYCHIC DETECTIVE

HOT

After enduring an eternity of multimedia hype masquerading as games, we finally have an interactive film that—no offense to the excellent WING COMMANDER IV—isn't based on an action game. The plot of this sci-fi detective mystery is carried on in real-time, and regardless of where you are in the game world, the other (non-player) characters get on with their fictional lives—making your quest for clues that much more challenging. The concept is fresh and mature, the acting surprisingly good, and the writing very strong indeed. There is a certain degree of frustration, as you are likely to fail often before finally winning the game. After you get hooked, however, you find that there's much more to replay than just finding the 14 different endings. Experienced gamers may only get 25 or so hours of gameplay out of PSYCHIC DETECTIVE, but they'll find that it's a wild mind-read, indeed. *-A. Dembo*

Electronic Arts, (415) 571-7171;
PC CD-ROM
Reader Service # 305

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ter and you have the action category in hand. The first is a 3-D action game based on Japanese robot movies and the second is one based on the concept of dark, graphic novels.

Finally, 3-D is also showing in strategy games. Philips' ENEMY NATIONS, a multiplayer space-age conquest game, uses 3-D buildings with terrain depth. Germany's FanPro has 3-D complexes in its PERRY RHODAN strategy game, based on the best-selling pulp science fiction novels in Germany. Even Mindscape plans to have a 3-D strategy game with its DARK EARTH strategy game to follow the adventure game (see cover story).

It has been the conventional industry wisdom for years that Europe has been five years ahead of the U.S. in graphics and five years behind in game play. Somehow, it looks like that may change in 1996. *Johnny Wilson*

3-D Audio Standard Promises New Dimensions In Sound

In our very visual world, it's easy to forget that we do a lot of "seeing" with our ears, using sounds to determine both location and direction of things we can't see, or see only peripherally. Studies at MIT's Media Lab compared user's perceptions of a baseline program and a second program with identical graphics, but better sound. When asked what was different, the users said the graphics looked better. Sound can add tremendously to gaming, and using sound cues to locate objects in an environment can add a good bit more.

To that end, Microsoft announced its Direct3D Sound API (Application Programming Interface) at the Computer Game Developers' conference. This newest member of the DirectX API family integrates tightly with DirectSound, allowing developers to assign positional information to sound events in a game. Direct3D Sound then applies filters to those sounds to make them appear to come from some other place than the speakers. Microsoft's goal with Direct3D is consistent 3-D audio effects, so that regardless of your audio hardware, the API will use your sound card's Digital Signal Processor if it has one, or use the CPU if it doesn't (check out our sound card feature in this issue).

Version 1.0 of the API will be available to software developers in August, and titles using it should come out later this year.—*Dave Salvator*

READERS' TOP 10

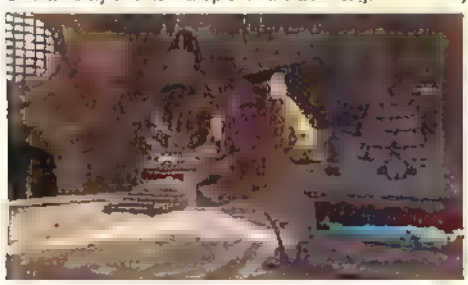
This month, Warcraft II takes over as the most-played game, while the original X-COM returns for its *17th month* on the chart. Be sure to send in your feedback card, so we know what games *you* are losing the most sleep over.

		Last Month	Months On Chart
1.	**Warcraft II** (Blizzard)	1	1
2.	**Steel Panthers** (SSI)	1	3
3.	**Mechwarrior 2** (Activision)	4	5
4.	**Command & Conquer** (Westwood)	2	4
5.	**Crusader: No Remorse** (Origin)	3	2
6.	**Heroes of Might and Magic** (New World Computing)	6	3
7.	**Stonekeep** (Interplay)	5	2
8.	**Panzer General** (SSI)	8	14
9.	**Anvil of Dawn** (New World)	—	1
10.	**X-Com: UFO Defense** (MicroProse)	—	17

ON THE SHELF

ZORK NEMESIS

In case you were wondering what's been happening lately in the land of Frobozz, things aren't going too well. Apparently some entity called Nemesis has brought a curse down upon the Forbidden Lands. It's your job to go and see what he's up to, and while you're at it, locate four missing VIPs. Unfortunately this new chapter in the ZORK saga plays more like a sequel to Myst. You wander around beautifully rendered 3-D environments, solving puzzles and piecing together the well crafted plot, which is based on the science of alchemy. But connections to previous ZORK games are peripheral; noticeably absent is the wicked sense of humor that elevated those games to something more than just another dungeon hack.



By itself, ZORK NEMESIS is an artistic achievement, and a challenging puzzle adventure for anyone who enjoys that sort of thing. But ZORK fans in search of a trip down memory lane may find there's no way to get there.

—*K. Hedstrom*

Activision, (310) 473-9200;
PC CD-ROM
Reader Service # 301

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK QUESTION PACK

Okay, so by now you *do* know Jack. You've been the hit of every party for the past six months, because you've dragged along your laptop and Berkeley Systems/Jellyvision's YOU DON'T KNOW JACK with you every time. But by now you've got it pretty well memorized that Scooby Doo and Hamlet

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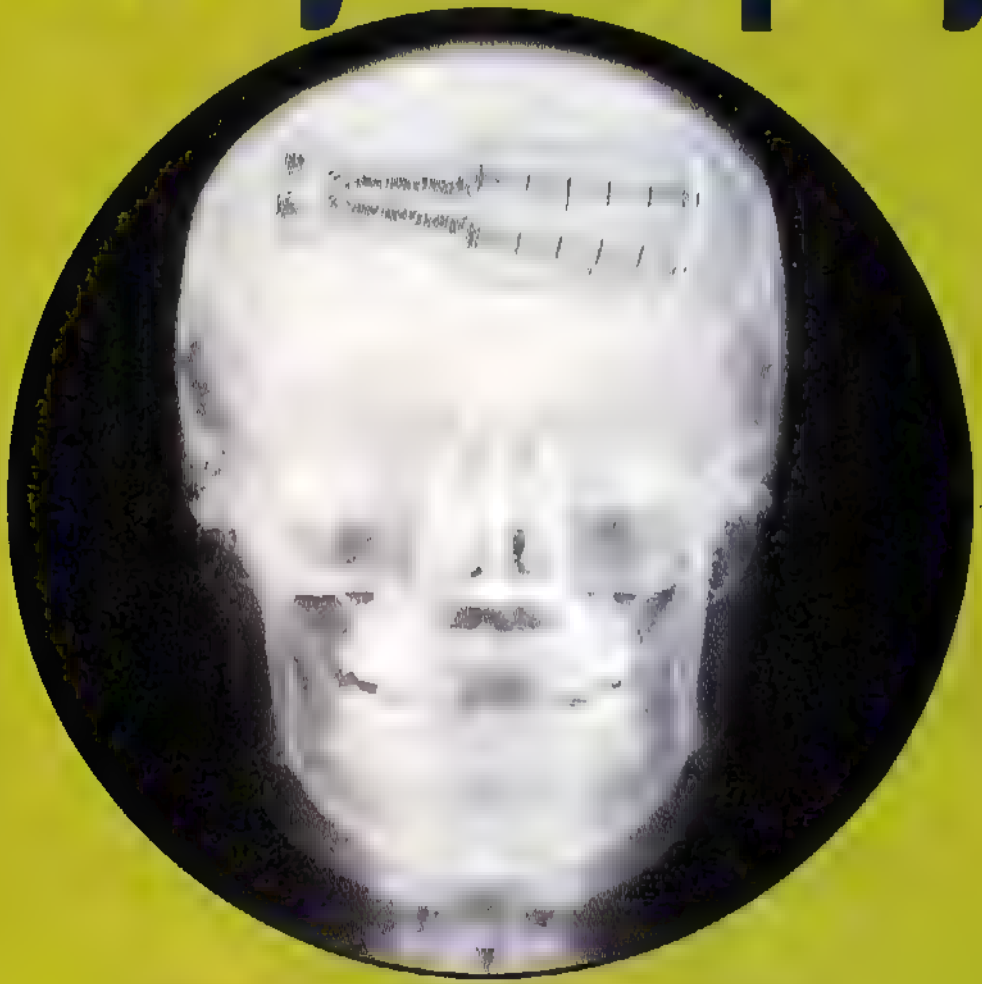

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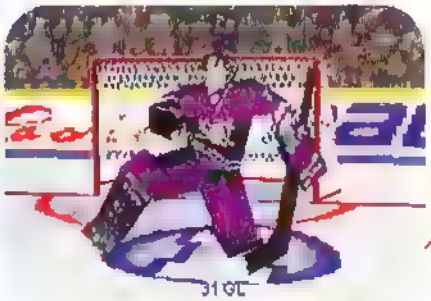

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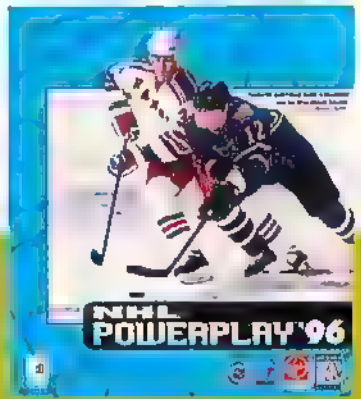

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Circle Reader Service #183

NASA Likes The Feel Of A ThrustMaster

So ThrustMaster's $500 F 16 FLCS Special Edition was a little to cheap for your tastes. You want quality and precision and you're willing to pay for it. How does $5,000 sound?

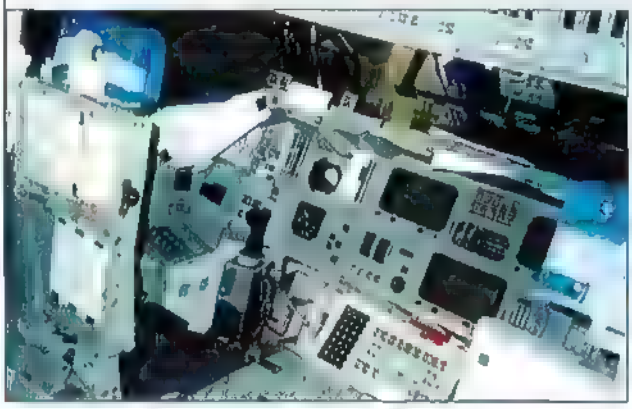
If you're NASA, and you're looking for a joystick good enough to fly zero G space shuttle simulations, five grand is a bargain. ThrustMaster, the maker of popular flight sim game controllers, recently won a contract with Lockheed Martin to supply space shuttle simulator control sticks to NASA. The RHC, or Rotational Hand Controller, will connect to UNIX stations and PC laptops to enable astronauts in training to practice maneuvering and landing techniques before jumping behind the stick of the real thing.

According to ThrustMaster's Bob Martin, the RHC is a "median fidelity" design. Essentially, it has all the same components—the stick and gimbals assembly—as the real shuttle stick. The only difference is that it's not flight certified, that is, it doesn't have the triple redundancy systems required of flight-certified instruments.

Like your typical PC joystick, the RHC has a button, a trigger and a hat switch. However, the stick also has three axes of movement: a pitch forward, a tilt backward and a "twist" or yaw, which emulates aircraft rudder pedals. The latter allows the pilot to angle into a crosswind without deviating from his target course. In addition to these three axes, the stick has a knuckle pitch—a small joint in the shaft that creates a smaller movement radius, which in turn provides more stability in the controller by keeping the push/pull action restricted to the wrist.

Major General Joe Engle, former commander of the space shuttle *Discovery*, tested and evaluated the controller. He says the RHC is, "very similar to the shuttle's. It has the same close geometry and stick force gradients." Maj. Gen. Engle is the only astronaut to ever manually land the space shuttle, entering the Earth's atmosphere at Mach 35.

The ThrustMaster RHC is expected to cost NASA about $5,000 per stick—a fraction of the estimated $1 million that NASA engineer Jim Brock says an original would cost. But if five grand is still too rich for your budget, ThrustMaster plans to have a retail version of the RHC on shelves by fall of this year for approximately $30.—*Jill Anderson*



ONE GIANT STICK FOR MANKIND The ThrustMaster stick designed for space shuttle simulators will be coming to a store near you.

ON THE SHELF

were both Great Danes. What to do?

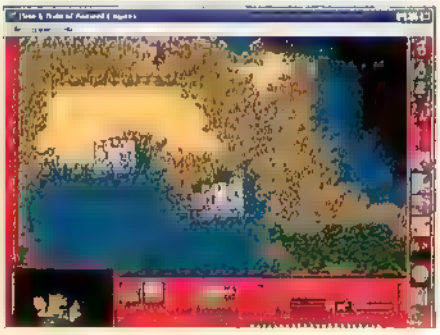
Why, run out and pick up the YOU DON'T KNOW JACK question pack. This bargain-priced $19.95 expansion disc adds 400 new irrelevant, uh, *irreverent* questions, new Jack Attacks, and more of those infuriating snickerdish testgums (i.e., gibberish questions). If you don't already have the best party game of 1995, you can pick up YOU DON'T KNOW JACK XL, which includes the 800 original questions and the 400 QUESTION PACK additions all on one disc.—*D. Atkin*

Berkeley Systems, (510) 540 5535,
PC/Mac CD ROM
Reader Service # 303

RISE & RULE OF ANCIENT EMPIRES

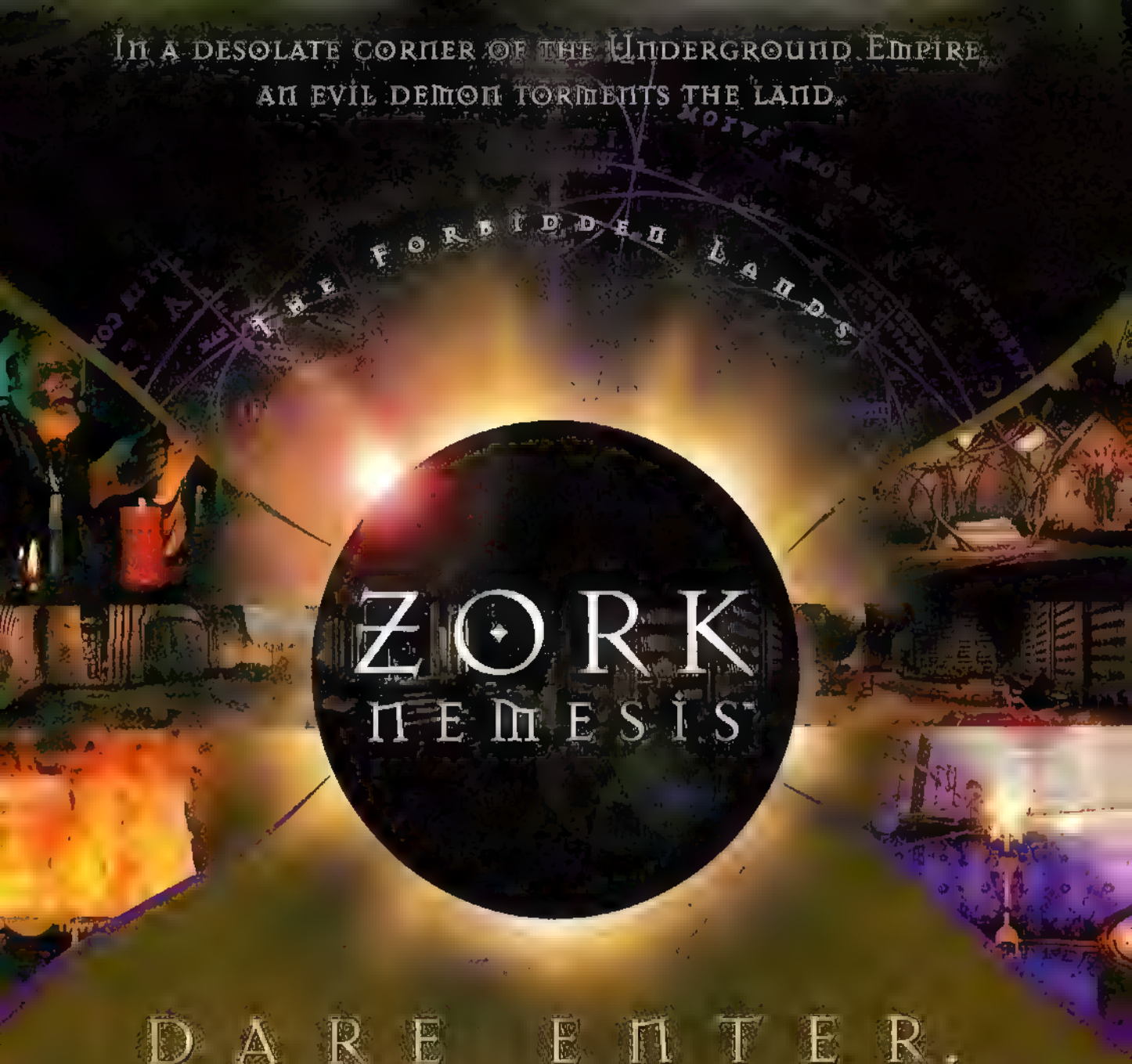
CG GOLD

Impressions has some fine strategy games to its credit, from both before



and after it was acquired by Sierra. But unlike LORDS OF THE REALM OR CAESAR II, RISE & RULE OF ANCIENT EMPIRES fails to immerse you in the flavor of the historical period—or the fun. The game offers turn-based accessibility, and the overall idea seems sound: contrast the far flung empire of Persia with the Greek city-state approach, or with the engineering feats of the Egyptians; Chinese, Indians and Celts are thrown in for even more variety. Yet, RISE & RULE strives so hard to be different from CIVILIZATION in every other way that it becomes too abstract, leaving out all of the engaging aspects of Sid Meier's classic design. The "sliding bars" used by the interface work better in theory than in practice, and the feedback is minimalist in the extreme (just how do advances help your empire?). RISE & RULE *is* pretty and it *does* have multiplayer options, but these aspects alone aren't enough to forge a gaming empire—especially in a world already populated by Civ II.—*T. Coleman*

Sierra, (800) 757-7707;
Windows CD ROM
Reader Service # 304



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Circle Reader Service #97

3-D With Performance Edge

Diamond Edge 3D Combines Audio/Video On One Card

Diamond was the first major player to get a PCI-based 3-D part to market with its Edge 3D accelerator card. Based on nVidia's "Swiss Army knife" NV1 chip, the VRAM based Edge 3D delivers good first-generation 3-D performance, and respectable 2 D Windows 95 GUI and DOS VGA acceleration, as well as General MIDI wavetable synthesis and Windows 95 wave audio. Despite having Windows 95 audio functionality, the Edge 3D has no Sound Blaster emulation for DOS titles, though you can use its wavetable synthesizer in games that support General MIDI.

NV1 can accelerate 3-D graphics effects like scaleable, perspective-corrected texture mapping, alpha blending, gouraud shading and lighting effects, but lacks Z-buffering, anti-aliasing, MIP mapping or interpolation. We evaluated the VRAM version of the Edge and were rather impressed, despite our previous knock at the DRAM version, which were fairly disappointing due to slow frame rates, and so-so DOS VGA performance.

RIDING DRAGONBACK PANZER DRAGOON, **one of the games bundled with the card, is a sim with a unique perspective, but it alone isn't worth the price of entry.**

The Edge 3D's three bundled titles, VIRTUA FIGHTER REMIX, NASCAR RACING, and PANZER DRAGOON, are good games and add some value to Diamond's 3D card. VF REMIX is a near perfect port of the Saturn 3D fighter, and is the best PC fighter available, with great gameplay, fast action and good 3-D graphics. Papyrus' Edge 3D optimized NASCAR RACING, one of 1994's best racing games, has some extra graphic details, like transparent smoke, but graphics and performance are pretty underwhelming. Frame rate with all the detail on is still slow, and objects pop up frequently on the horizon. PANZER DRAGOON, a dragon "simulator" where you take to the skies on dragonback on a shooting spree, is a fun, refreshing change from spaceships and planes.

Edge 3D has ports for two digital Sega GamePad controllers, and ships with one. The controllers are very good overall, and add greatly to gameplay on the bundled titles.

VF REMIX and PANZER DRAGOON are Edge 3D-exclusive games, and are fun to play, but an acceptable level of performance doesn't come cheap. The 2 MB VRAM version of Edge 3D is street-priced at about $429, and the 4 MB VRAM is around $599, pretty steep prices for products that will be dated when next generation boards based on Rendition and 3DFX chips appear later this year. If you're really pining to play VF REMIX and PANZER DRAGOON, your best bet would be to buy a Saturn for half the price, or wait for non-exclusive PC versions.—*D. Salvator & E. Chin*

A BIG BUNDLE **The Edge 3D card offers respectable graphic acceleration, and comes bundled with** VIRTUA FIGHTER REMIX, NASCAR RACING **and** PANZER DRAGOON.

ON THE SHELF

CRYSTALAKE SPEAKERS

HOT

Audio often winds up being the mistreated step-child of computer gaming, taking a back seat to graphics. But CrystaLake Multimedia wants to change all that. Their new 650 speakers deliver what is probably the best audio we've ever heard from a PC. The 650's sonic image covers the highs, the lows and everything in between, and their "depth of field" (sounds in foreground and background) is excellent. Game audio takes on a whole new dimension when your speakers cleanly crank out big sounds like engine rumble, weapon fire, and explosions, as well as sounds crisply moving from left to right and vice versa. About the only drawback to the 650 is the price: $699 list—pretty steep. But if you're a gamer who also does MIDI/audio production with your rig, these units would wear both the killer-game audio and studio monitor hats very well.—*D. Salvator*

CrystaLake Multimedia, (503) 222-2603;

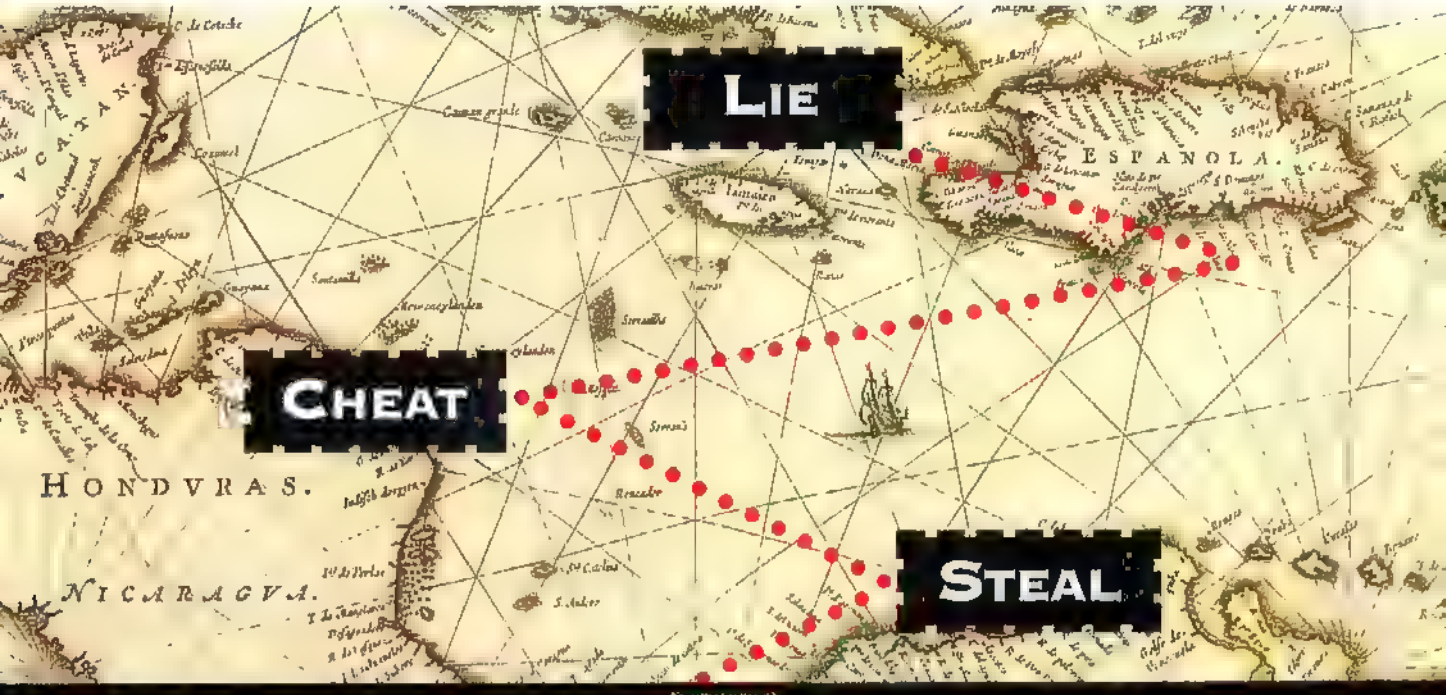
Reader Service # 306

ABUSE

GOLD

We've seen this game before, in various incarnations and over the past decade or two. ABUSE is simply a 2-D, side-scrolling platform game, where you control a little Predator-like cyborg through various dark and shadowy hallways. Along your left-to-right adventure, you'll be greeted by plenty of

Experience nation building at its best.

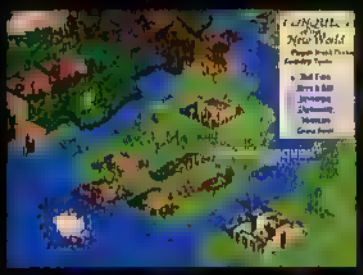


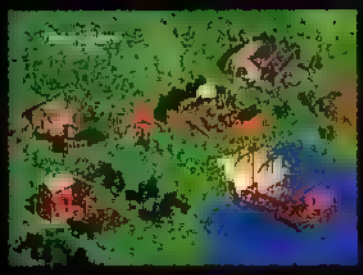
Conquest of the New World™

Enticed by the lure of exploring the unknown, you cross treacherous seas in search of the New World. But be warned! Europe's other conquering heroes are in pursuit of the same glory.

Conquest of the New World™ is a single or multi-player strategy game where you're in command of the explorers, settlers, and mercenary soldiers destined to survey the land, to build new colonies, and to protect your emerging nation. As you search for new rivers and mountains, you'll come across other colonies and encounter friendly and hostile native tribes. Your growing nation is constantly at the mercy of world events and the endless threat of surprise attacks.

Only through a perfect balance of diplomacy, exploration, trade and warfare can you build the ultimate nation, declare independence, and experience the true power of Conquest.





"Conquest of the New World has beauty, brains & depth" — Strategy Plus

- Single or Multi-player action for up to 6 over a network & head-to-head with a modem
- Colonies come to life in stunning SVGA graphics and exciting 3D animations
- Combat explodes with the echoing blasts of infantry, cavalry & cannons

"An E-ticket Ride" — Computer Gaming World

CD ROM DOS VERSION

AGES 8+

Interplay

Chart your course for the Interplay WEB site (http://www.interplay.com) and download the interactive demo.

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All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

CQP1

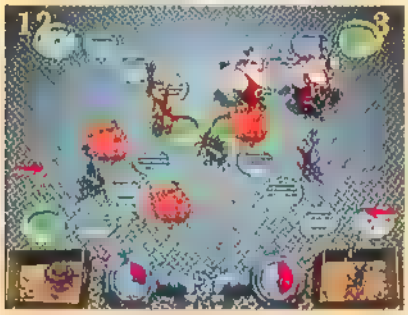
Circle Reader Service #53

cranky and vicious alien creatures. The graphics are standard VGA. And although the darkness can be adjusted, everything is particularly dark and grey, making it a little hard to discern objects, and your main character is very small. While playing this game, I couldn't help but feel like I'd fallen into a timewarp and was stuck playing an '80s side-scroller. ABUSE has some distinguishing characteristics, though. It comes with a scenario editor and also supports network play. There are also quite a few cool weapons, and the controls are easy to pick up. It isn't anything new or different, but ABUSE could be useful for a few hours of fun.—*E. Chin*

Origin, (800) 245-4525;
PC CD-ROM
Reader Service # 307

GEARHEADS

If you met Krush Kringle in a dark alley, I'm sure you'd turn and run the other way. And that's exactly what the toys do when they encounter this muscle-bound Santa in Philips Media's hilarious and addictive game, GEARHEADS. In a digital version of the rock-paper-scissors game, clockwork chickens are pitted against pugilist kangaroos, robots against roaches and walking timebombs against



androids.

Score points by getting your toys across the board before they are punched, zapped or literally scared to death by another toy. The trick is to discover each toy's special power, so that you can select a team able to defeat the opposing side. But remember to wind up your toys, otherwise your battleground may start looking like a toy cemetery.

Three levels of difficulty, plus the ability to select battlegrounds and customize your toy box, help to sustain players' interest, but it was the eclectic cast of characters that kept me coming back for more.—*C. Panther*

Philips Media, (800) 883-3767;
Windows CD-ROM
Reader Service # 308

FLASHPOINT LT

A hot SCSI at a cool price. If you've thinking about moving to a high-performance PCI SCSI card, but have been unwilling to plunk down upwards of $300 for the high-priced spread, there is no need to look any further

Full review will be on the web.

than the Buslogic FlashPoint LT. Buslogic has long been the Avis of the SCSI world to Adaptec's Hertz. The Flashpoint should go a long way toward erasing that image.

The Flashpoint LT supports true ultra SCSI speeds (although you need ultra-capable peripherals to get top performance). It also supports standard SCSI-2 devices. Using ZD Labs Winbench 96 Disk Winmark, the Flashpoint edged out Adaptec's 2940UW in performance on the same hard disk. At a street price much lower than $200, it's practically a steal. Check it out.—*L. Case*

Buslogic, (408) 492-9090;
PC
Reader Service # 312

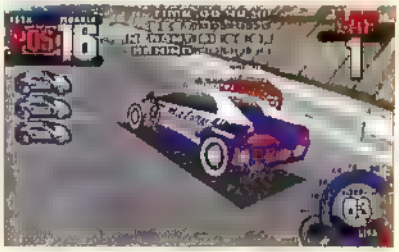
ADDONIX 6X CD-ROM

The Addonics 6X CD-ROM is marketed as a "portable" drive for notebook computers that don't already have one. The idea seems attractive, but you would assume that a portable CD drive would be lighter and smaller than the notebook computer. The problem is, the Addonics "portable" CD drive easily weighs more than most notebook computers, is bigger than some laptops and is not battery-powered. It's one concession to "portability" is the use of the parallel port as the interface. This is a lousy concession, as it just makes a fast CD-ROM drive perform like a 2X drive. Oh, did we mention that it also has built-in audio for laptops without sound chips? Great idea, except it consistently locked up our test notebook computer. If you're in the market for a portable CD-ROM drive, we suggest looking elsewhere.—*L. Case*

Addonics Technologies, (510) 438-6530;
PC Laptops
Reader Service # 310

WHIPLASH

Interplay's WHIPLASH is one of the most outwardly impressive automobile racing games to blaze down the track in some time. Brimming with eye-popping graphics, brain-rattling stunts and options galore, it's a package ready to be molded to any user's preference, and it looks fabulous in the process. WHIPLASH is far from the standard cartoonish approach of arcade games of the past. Although its car handling isn't up to simulation standards, it's still pretty good for the arcade environment, and acceleration and braking distances are quite realistic. What's more, you'll actually have to come to a stop in the pit area as your crew attempts to repair



your progressively damaged car. While WHIPLASH certainly isn't the perfect blend of simulation and arcade, it is another sign that such a product isn't far off.—*Gordon Goble*

Interplay, (714) 553 6655;
Windows CD-ROM
Reader Service # 311

HAVOC

HAVOC is a new first-person shooter from Reality Bytes, in the tradition of TERMINAL VELOCITY. But, where TERMINAL VELOCITY had you zooming above 3-D landscapes in futuristic fighters, HAVOC drops you down in the 3-D landscapes, in one of three armed and armored vehicles. HAVOC suffers from the same overall problem as TERMINAL VELOCITY; you're just racing around at top speed, destroying everything in sight as quickly as possible in an effort to make it to the next level and repeat the process. Instead of being simple and deep—hallmarks of a good computer game—HAVOC is fancy and shallow. Or, as Granny used to say, all sizzle and no steak.—*Mark Clarkson*

Reality Bytes, Inc., (616) 621-2550;
PC/Mac CD-ROM
Reader Service # 30

Now on PC CD-ROM

EARTHWORM JIM 1&2

The Whole Can 'O Worms

For those whose appetite for lunacy and danger are never satisfied, there's now a hefty double portion of Jim-tastic-ness in one convenient, spill-proof serving! So there's twice the adventure, twice the graphics, twice the wicked humor. Making for a combined 17 levels of maniacal mayhem.

But open it at your own risk. Digesting the whole thing at one sitting may result in some major head-swelling.

http://www.playmatestoys.com

Circle Reader Service #283

SIGHTINGS

Here's an early look at the space invaders that will be vying for room on your hard drive. Some of these games are still months away, and they aren't even playable yet, but at least you can see what they look like, and get an idea what their intentions are.

Monty Python and the Quest for the Holy Grail

(The following should be read aloud in a strong British accent.)

Attention: All those who miss whacking silly gophers on the head and annihilating well-dressed chickens, chin up, help is on the way. The lads at 7th Level, those reponsible for MONTY PYTHON'S COMPLETE WASTE OF TIME, are busily engaged with something completely different. Well, somewhat different, but not completely different. The new pursuit, to be labeled MONTY PYTHON AND THE QUEST FOR THE HOLY GRAIL, will allow you to guide King Arthur himself and his band of merry brigands around England circa 932 AD in search of the sacred Grail. Along the way, you'll battle black knights, three headed knights, and knights who say things that make no sense whatsoever. You'll face much temptation at Castle Anthrax (who can honestly refuse an invitation to "Spank the Virgin"?), and you'll acquire some very essential skills for catching flying bovine. Our messengers report that HOLY GRAIL contains classic scenes from the film production, more of Terry Gilliam's original animation and a few new twists, so in case one particular area doesn't make you jolly, we don't expect you'll be tossing it into the moat. Watch for THE QUEST FOR THE HOLY GRAIL on or around the summer solstice. Those who make camp at Stonehenge in anticipation of the game's release will be fined and forced to stand on one leg for long periods of time in the sun. (Cue large foot and stomping sound.)—*C. Panther*

Callahan's Crosstime Saloon

Spider Robinson's short story collection *Callahan's Crosstime Saloon*, released way back in 1977, was a true rarity: funny science fiction. It's been followed by a number of print sequels (the first of which, *Time Traveler's Strictly Cash*, was full of yucks, but the rest of which were fairly yucky), and now it makes the hyperspace jump to CD-ROM.

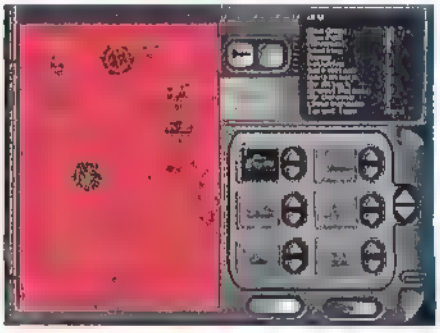
Appropriately produced by Legend—purveyors of another rarity, the fully computer game that really *is* funny—the CD-ROM version of CALLAHAN'S CROSSTIME SALOON is set for release this fall. The adventure drops you into Harry Callahan's place, a New England bar where the weekly pun contest gathers more attention than the oddly regular alien visitations. CALLAHAN'S promises to take a bit of its inspiration from that other famous New England bar, *Cheers*. The adventure will be played in an episodic format, with six stories, each of which can be completed in an evening or two.

It turns out that Earth is an art exhibit for the entertainment of the Gods. A God named Gingranich wants to cut Earth's funding (Robinson's works are generally a *bit* more subtle than this premise). Luckily, Gingranich's advisor drops into Callahan's place, and madcap adventure ensues. With the inspiration of Spider Robinson and the creative talents of Josh Mandel (FREDDY PHARKAS, SPACE QUEST VI) behind it, CALLAHAN'S CROSSTIME SALOON promises pun for the whole family.—*D. Atkin*

Star General

So you've crushed the pitiful Allied forces in PANZER GENERAL and dished out some pay back as the ALLIED GENERAL, and now you're close to liberating the Realm of Aer in FANTASY GENERAL. So when the evil scourge of the Shadowlord has been wiped away, what's next? Well, the folks at Catware, at the behest of SSI, will bring STAR GENERAL to your PC in the Fall of 1996. And, where FANTASY GENERAL spirited you away to a magical realm, STAR GENERAL beams you up into space.

So what has the General brought home this time? Try seven races to play, both space *and* land combat, innovations to the PANZER GENERAL interface, network and modem play, and a campaign with hundreds of planets to conquer. As the only magazine to have seen actual code, *CGW* can tell you that this is one hot wargame that will continue the excellent tradition of PANZER and FANTASY GENERAL.



YOU CAN WATCH HIM ON TV

YOU CAN READ ABOUT
HIM IN THE SPORTS SECTION.

OR YOU CAN SEND HIM IN TO
PITCH RELIEF IN THE BOTTOM OF THE NINTH.

No matter how you slice and dice the lineup, when you play *Front Page Sports: Baseball Pro '96* you'll be playing the Big Unit of baseball sims. It's the only game that relies on more than stats to put the ball in play. It also goes deep to take a look at wind, humidity, ball spin, and bat speed on every single swing. Graphics hit a dinger too, with ultra-realistic motion-captured 3D animation, and camera controls that let you watch from anywhere in all 28 big league ballparks. Then there's the section where you can slip into the body of any active major leaguer and show your stuff at pitching, hitting, and fielding. The coolest thing, though, is that you get to make managerial decisions that are highly questionable. Or, possibly, pure genius.

SIERRA

Wanna see some amazing screen shots? Log on at http://www.sierra.com, AOL or Compuserve. To order the game, call 1-800-757-7707.

One major interface change is the split screen, which will allow you to view your unit's information specs, recruitment screen and other information at the same time you view the map. You won't have to disengage from combat like the previous GENERAL games required. STAR GENERAL is also bound to have even more hours of gameplay packed in, because once you've decimated a planet's ships in space combat, you must then land on the planet and conduct a full-fledged land battle to claim it. In effect, STAR GENERAL will pack two games into one, an entirely new space combat model and land combat. But the land combat won't just be PANZER with a facelift. The terrain will have an even greater impact on combat, both in space (black holes will tear your ships apart) and on the planet. In addition, you'll have to purchase structures before you can build certain units (in similar, though turn-based fashion to COMMAND & CONQUER). During the campaign game, you'll basically have to move from your tiny section of space, across the huge space map and eventually conquer the 200+ planets in the sector. You can't play as any other race than the humans during the campaign game, but there will be mini campaigns, like an alien civil war or two, where you can choose to be any of the seven races. There's more; STAR GENERAL will be both a Windows 95 and a DOS game, but the Windows 95 version will have a larger campaign and maps twice the size of the DOS version. Also, the Windows 95 version will support multiplayer options, but the DOS version's multiplay is still "up in the stars." STAR GENERAL is definitely a game to watch, and *CGW* will keep you posted on its development in the months to come.
— Elliott Chin

HANDS ON

These are the products in development we've actually spent some time with. They represent some of the most interesting titles in the Pipeline, and they are complete enough to actually tell how they're going to play. Most should be released soon.

Nemesis

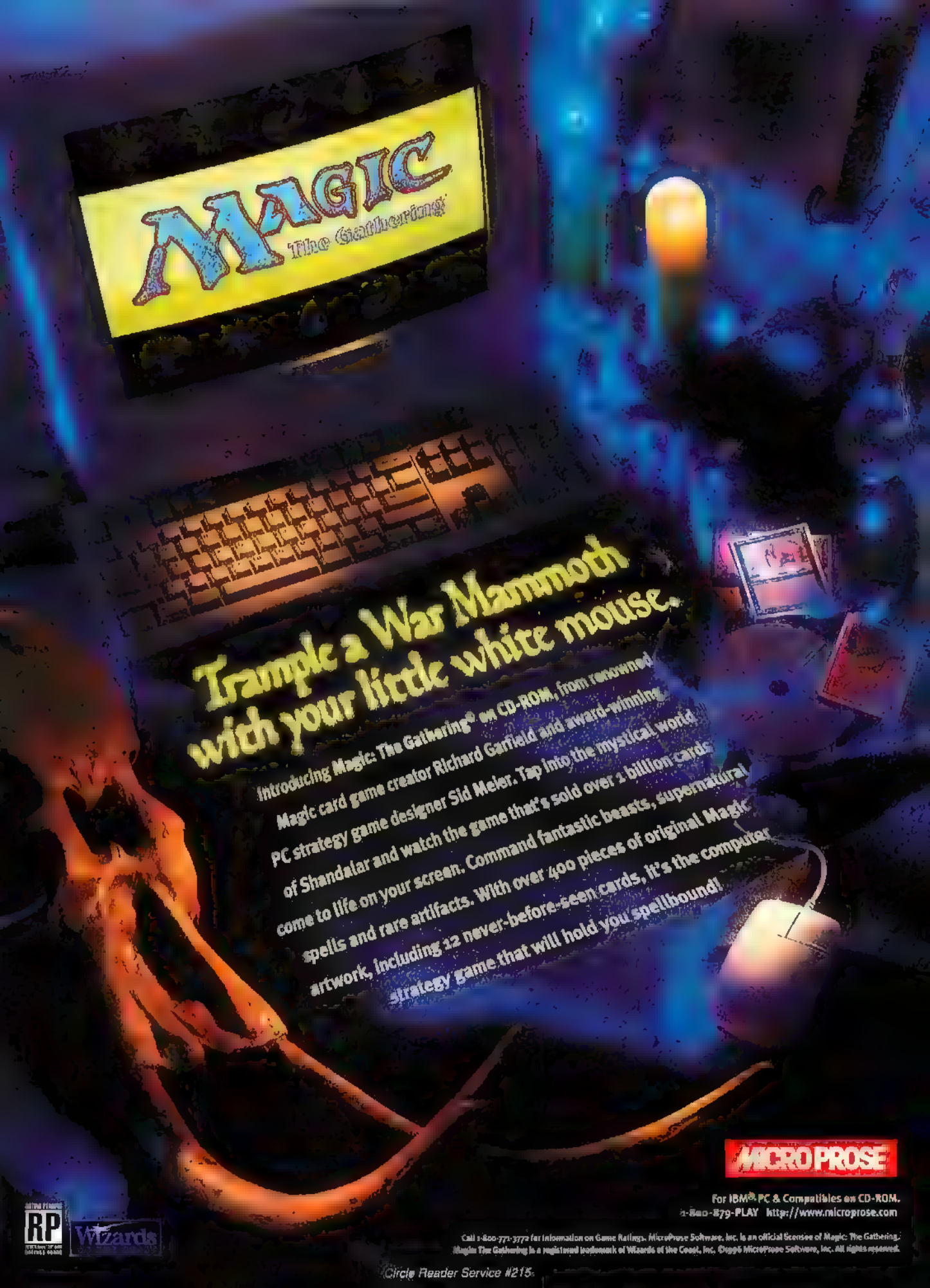
No, *not* ZORK NEMESIS, this stand-alone adventure/role-playing hybrid hails from the lands of Sir-Tech, and appears to be a valiant attempt to appease the masses awaiting the next WIZARDRY installment. To call the game "puzzle-rich" is somewhat of an understatement, as you must select various scrolls in a particular order (from the very first screen) before you can even begin to play the main portion of the game. The scrolls represent your familiarity with the various forces of nature: Earth, Air, Water and Fire. And it is this concept of Elemental magic, and its inherent secrets, that becomes the driving force in the game.

As you strive for knowledge of the arcane arts, you meet various characters—some assist you, others want you for a dinner entree—and interact with them through an interface that's hardly as cozy as that of their classic WIZARDRY series, yet more sophisticated than that of DRUID, Sir-Tech's last game in this genre. In fact, as you wander through the splendor of lushly rendered forests and dank dungeons, you'll find yourself barred from entering certain apparently open areas, probably wondering, as I did, "why?" And worse, "what's it all for?" The first-person combat has been done better in RPGs (ULTIMA UNDERWORLD, in particular), and certainly Sir-Tech's own CRUSADERS OF THE DARK SAVANT is far deeper in terms of plot. We won't know, of course, until the final version is available, but NEMESIS looks to be more like, "anything goes for game-starved fans," than the next big thing in RPGs. And let's hope they change the name, too.—*Terry Coleman*

Sir-Tech, (800) 447-1230

Total Pinball 3D

A few years ago, PINBALL DREAMS—21st Century's wonderful old steel ball simulator for the Amiga—virtually defined the computer pinball genre. So it's shocking to find the company's latest entry, TOTAL PINBALL 3D, to be such a disappointment. The game features four tables, each of which is playable in either 2-D scrolling mode, or a 3-D view similar to what an eight foot-tall player would see from the front of the machine. The 2-D modes can be run in graphics modes ranging from 320x240 up to 800x600, all but the highest



Circle Reader Service #215.

HANDS ON

resolutions scroll as you play. The 3-D mode is played on a static 640x480 screen.

The game does sport some innovative features. Multiball action allows up to 10 simultaneous balls in play, and a VCR feature lets you save and review games. Unfortunately, unlike typical game recorders, there's no way to pop in right before you messed up and try to finish the game from that point. This would have made VCR mode useful and fun; as it stands, watching a five-minute pinball game replay is tedium *extraordinaire*.

The tables—Tarantula, Jailbreak, Kickoff (a soccer design), and Jackpot—are uninspiring and unlikely. While Jackpot is the best of the bunch, the graphics are still substandard, especially in 2-D mode. Ball physics, usually a 21st-century hallmark don't feel right here. The ball sometimes jumps at amazing speed, seemingly accelerated by the same cosmic effect that makes European teens play arcade games at a speed three times that of their American counterparts.

There is one nice touch, an Audit mode, which allows you to check recent and cumulative results (scores, special shots, bonuses, and so on) for each table. Overall, TOTAL PINBALL 3-D gets high scores for concept, but the implementation falls straight between the flippers.

—Denny Atkin

21st Century, (716) 872 1200

PC CD-ROM

Voyeur 2

Playing VOYEUR 2 is like watching a bad *Dynasty* rerun without the humor. Interweave Entertainment and Philips Media jump on the "Let's make a movie for the PC" bandwagon, hoping to whet the appetites of non-gamers by using a familiar medium to hook them on "gameplay." If there was any, that is. If you liked VOYEUR 1, here's more of the same. If you didn't, there's nothing new to attract you to this sequel. The plot is straightforward: Elizabeth Duran discovers her lover's death was no accident and she wants to expose the killer. You, the voyeur, as her only witness, need to capture the incriminating evidence on videotape and solve the mystery before she, too, is murdered.

Too much observation and not enough interaction is immediately a problem, even though the video is interesting. But why not just rent a movie? There is no save feature: if you don't solve the mystery, you're thrown back to the beginning. You wouldn't necessarily want to watch the same movie over and over, so why do so with this game? Sadly, even the characters didn't capture my interest, and as for trying to engage that "elusive female audience," we can get profound lines such as "She's obviously a great piece of ass" and "I don't want to play basketball, I want to get laid," from Melrose Place.

—Charlotte Panther

Philips Media, (800) 883-3767

Mac/Windows CD-ROM

PIPELINE

9 Tribeca		6/96
10th Planet Bethesda		9/96
1943 European Air War MicroProse		Summer 96
Age of Rifles SSI		7/96
Alde De Camp 2 HPS Simulations		Summer 96
American Civil War Interactive Magic		Summer 96
Azrael's Tear Mindscape		6/96
Battleground: Shiloh Talonsoft		7/96
Betrayal In Antara Sierra		9/96
Blood 3D Realms/FormGen		Summer 96
Callahan's Crosstime Saloon Legend		10/96
Close Combat Microsoft/Atomic		7/96
Daggerfall Bethesda		Summer 96
Dark Earth Mindscape		10/96
Diablo Blizzard		Summer 96
Dungeon Keeper EA/Bullfrog		6/96
Grand Prix 2 Spectrum HoloByte		Summer 96
Guardians of Destiny Virgin		Summer 96
Flying Nightmares 2000 Domark		Summer 96
History of the World Avalon Hill		8/96
Leisure Suit Larry 7 Sierra		Fall 96
Lighthouse Sierra		6/96
Magic of Xanth Legend		Fall 96
Master of Orion 2: Antares MicroProse		Summer 96
Monty Python & Holy Grail 7th Level		6/96
Myst II Broderbund		Fall 96
NCAA Football Mindscape		8/96
Necrodome SSI		8/96
Nemesis Sir-Tech		9/96
Noir Cyberdreams		9/96
One Must Fall Epic		Fall 96
Over the Reich Avalon Hill		Summer 96
Pacific Tide Arsenal		Fall 96
Pax Imperia II Blizzard		9/96
Quake id Software		"When it's ready"
Return to Krondor 7th Level		6/96
Reverence Cyberdreams		Fall 96
Robert E. Lee Sierra		6/96
Shadow Warrior 3D Realms/FormGen		Fall 96
Shadows of Riva Sir-Tech		8/96
SimGolf Maxis		Summer 96
Star Fleet Academy Interplay		Summer 96
Star General SSI		Fall 96
Star Trader Mindscape		6/96
Star Trek: Generations Spectrum HoloByte		9/96
SuperHeroes MicroProse		Summer 96
Syndicate Wars EA		9/96
The Shrinking Character Cyberdreams		Winter 95
Timelapse GTE Entertainment		8/96
Total Pinball 3D 21st Century		5/96
Trivial Pursuit Hasbro Interactive		7/96
X-Com 3: The Apocalypse MicroProse		Fall 96
Xenophage Apogee/FormGen		Summer 96
Voyeur 2 Philips		7/96
Z Virgin		Summer 96

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integrated
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enlightenment
smart
fun
big
what's your destination?
family
performance
cool
convergence
field mouse
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16MB RAM
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Pentium® processor
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DESTINATION

Your idea of home computers is about to change. Or perhaps we should say, your dreams are about to come true. All from the comfort of your couch. The fully integrated computer/family entertainment system has arrived! Direct from Gateway 2000, it's the Destination Big Screen PC.

Featuring a wireless keyboard and mouse for hassle-free computing.

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D5-166

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- 16-Bit Hi-Fi Wavetable Audio Card
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The Computer Gaming World 1996 Premier Awards

The past year has seen a number of games destined to follow in the footsteps of titles like FALCON 3.0, Sid Meier's CIVILIZATION, and M.U.L.E.—these programs, too, will someday be considered classics. As computer hardware has reached new heights of speed and power, and developers have honed their craftsman's tools, today's simulations edge ever nearer to the real thing, recent wargames bring you that much closer to the battlefront, and adventures may finally be achieving the Holy Grail status of true interactive movies. We present here the best of the past year, in the *Computer Gaming World* Premier Awards.

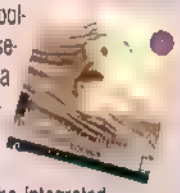
Each year, the editors of *CGW* try to single out the best computer game in each category, as well as the Best of the Best—our Premier Game of the Year. We don't nominate games that are merely popular, or games which simply appeal to us. We nominate games with the realism, brilliance, and audacity to suspend a cynical gamer's disbelief and have him or her *crawling*, with complete disregard for sleep and social standing, back for more. In other words, we nominate the BEST. The games are judged on a number of levels, including originality and innovation, playability, contribution to their genre, popularity among our readership, impact upon the computer gaming industry, and just plain *fun* value. In the next few pages, we invite you to celebrate the finalists and winners of these Premier awards with us. You'll discover why we thought the finalists were so important, and why we believe the winners are truly the best in their class.

And, for the first time, we've also included the Readers' Choice for each category, so you can see how your choices compared to ours.

GAME OF THE YEAR

The overall Game of the Year always generates controversy. The Game of the Year must transcend genre boundaries and appeal to a wide range of gamers. This year's winner was a clear-cut choice. THE BEAST WITHIN: GABRIEL KNIGHT II pushes the envelope in story, technology, and design.

Both GABRIEL KNIGHT adventures have been something special. They are more than games; they are art. The original GABRIEL KNIGHT offered brilliant symbolism using the visual metaphor of dream sequences in the style of a graphic novel. As a game, it offered a mix of easy, tough and indecipherable puzzles, but as a story it communicated that we have indissoluble and mysterious links to our past that need to be integrated into our personal image of self.



THE BEAST WITHIN goes further. It still offers brilliant symbolism, but it also offers more in gameplay than its predecessor. As the title suggests, Jane Jensen's script addresses humankind's desire to embrace the primitive and how that base nature can overpower us. Yet, she doesn't preach to us or even offer a final answer. She merely used wordplay and symbolism to illuminate, rather than to blind.

In terms of game design, Jensen offers a great variety of clue types: audio, text, visual object and cinematic scene. She even integrated a strategy game within the climactic puzzle. Nathan and Darlou Gams designed a game environment with a rich, textured look,and Robert Holmes outdid his past efforts with an incredible faux-Wagner piece for the finale. In terms of technology, the programming team seamlessly interlaced the digitized video, photographic backdrops and the game interface. Finally, the full-motion video was used extremely well to reward the player with additional information rather than punish the player with interminable cut scenes.

None of these people is Gabriel Knight; they're members of the development team: (left to right) Jerry Shaw, Robert Holmes, Jane Jensen, John Shroades, Sabine Duvall, Darlou and Nathan Gams.

GABRIEL KNIGHT II is the continuation of a brilliant tradition—the graphic adventure as art. That it combines solid technology and a marvelous aesthetic with outstanding gameplay is a testament to a designer who understands that "the game is the thing." Long live Gabriel Knight!

Readers' Choice: WARCRAFT II, BLIZZARD

WARGAME OF THE YEAR

Wargames returned to their roots this year. All of the finalists were turn-based, but none quite as staid or predictable as one might expect. SSI's STEEL PANTHERS, this year's winner, is the most focused game by legendary designer Gary Grigsby in years. Grognards love the game for its attention to realistic detail, while others are entranced by the game's beauty. Within the familiarity of the turn-based structure, STEEL PANTHERS keeps things brisk, unpredictable and violent. The smoke, the wreckage of the battlefield, the distinctive "chink" of Sherman tank fire bouncing helplessly off Tiger tanks–all add to the tension and chaos of battle in this evocative, tremendous achievement of WWII tactical warfare.

BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG by Talonsoft is so much sheer fun that I could have captured top honors in many prior years. As the BATTLEGROUND series continues to mature, it continues to blend the best elements of board games and miniatures with the strengths of computer wargames.

Incredible Simulations' CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND builds on the modest success of DEFEND THE ALAMO! with a richer, more hard edged historical simulation of the controversial events of the 7th Cavalry's last ride. It's challenging, fun and quite clever–not bad coming from what's essentially a one-man operation.

Scott Hamilton's PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS goes beyond even the customary HPS Simulations level of detail. PANTHERS is as complex on a tactical level as say, PACIFIC WAR is on a strategic one. Still, if you can handle the sheer amount of data thrown at you, you will find a playable and enjoyable game at its core.

Gary Grigsby: steely-eyed designer and programmer of Steel Panthers.

For those who wonder why all those old SPI board games never find their way onto the computer, RAW Entertainment comes to the rescue with RISE OF THE WEST. The game isn't much to look at, but it's old-fashioned in the best sense: a tough AI, clean interface and challenging scenarios let you attempt to out-do Charlemagne, or die heirless. The sweep of the Dark Ages takes on a certain grandeur, as does this modest product, easily RAW's best game in years.

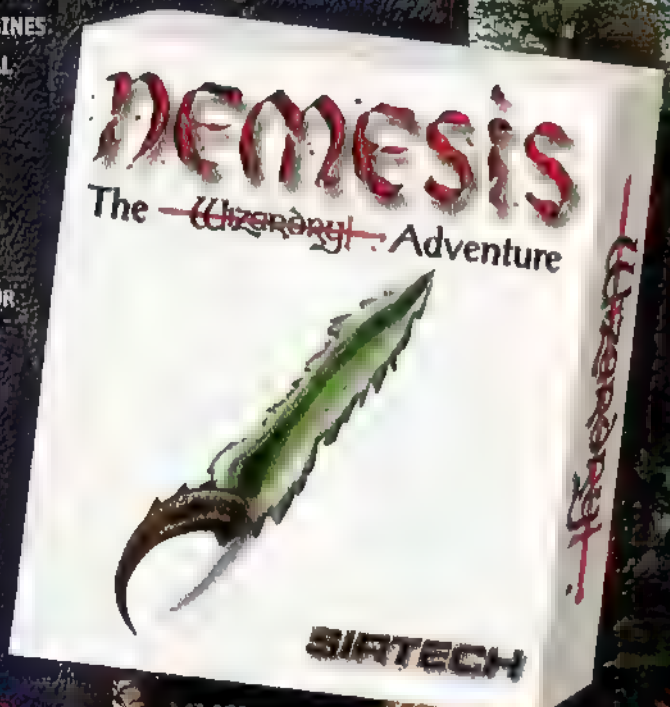
Readers' Choice: STEEL PANTHERS, SSI

Only one adventure has earned the Wizardry title...

The Wizardry series has sold millions of copies world wide. This fall, Sirtech ushers in *Nemesis*, the world's first *Wizardry Adventure*. At Sirtech "Wizardry" is a name a product earns, and *Nemesis* has been put through the wringer.

Over 2.5 gigabytes (4 CDs) of intense virtual worlds bring new meaning to the phrase "epic story." With the deliberate absence of video, *Nemesis* combines over 10,000 frames of original 3D art and SVGA animations, with real time interaction.

This is an intense story about virtual beings with real lives and real enemies that make your visit real unpleasant. *Nemesis* marks the beginning of yet another Wizardry Legend.



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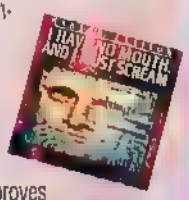
ADVENTURE GAME OF THE YEAR

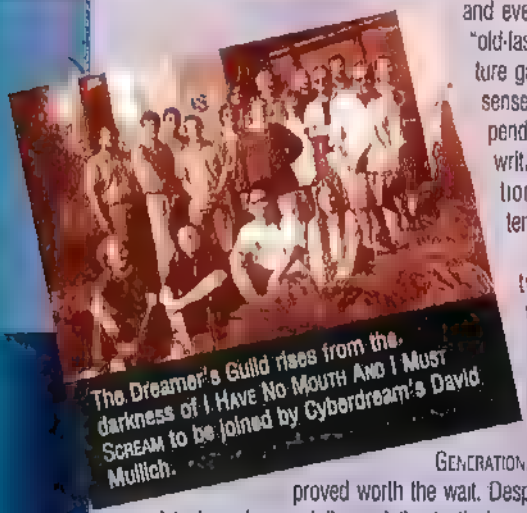
The Adventure Game of the Year is Harlan Ellison's I Have No Mouth And I Must Scream. Though Ellison has won many awards for literary excellence in the past, he shares this honor with the game's designer, David Sears, the game's developers, The Dreamers' Guild, and the game's publisher, MGM/Cyberdreams. I Have No Mouth is an innovative game where the interaction enriches the vivid atmosphere of Ellison's award-winning story. Even Ellison's voiceover as the sadistic *uber* computer, AM, adds to the game's freshness. With both intense gameplay and emotional punch, I Have No Mouth proves that game licenses don't have to be pale imitations of their literary predecessors.



The other finalists provided their own degrees of freshness and strong writing. Capstone and DreamForge Intertainment teamed to bring the late Roger Zelazny's science fiction visions to life in the beautiful Chronomaster. The many worlds of the various "pocket universes" are each unique, featuring clever puzzles and gorgeous

SVGA scenes. Both the script and the voice talents lift Chronomaster well above the usual standards of the genre.

Sanctuary Woods took a more classical adventure game approach to showcase the explorations of Robert Ripley in The Riddle of Master Lu. The end result is satisfying and even charming-an "old-fashioned" adventure game in the best sense, because it depends on strength of writing and interaction with characters to win.



The Dreamer's Guild rises from the darkness of I Have No Mouth And I Must Scream to be joined by Cyberdream's David Mullich.

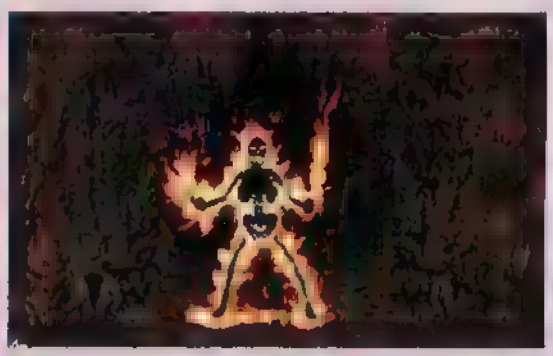
The more than two years that went into Spectrum HoloByte's Star Trek: The Next Generation: A Final Unity, proved worth the wait. Despite inconsistent graphics and disappointing tactical combat, near-impeccable voiceovers from the stellar televison cast made the game very compelling. Moreover, the game's script was at least as well written as many of the series' final episodes.

Readers' Choice: Full Throttle, LucasArts

ROLE-PLAYING GAME OF THE YEAR

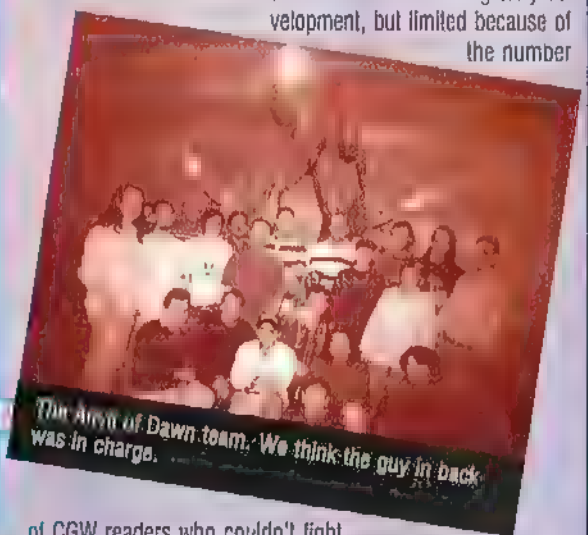
This is the year of the solitaire role playing adventure. 3-D first-person perspective has caused a de-emphasis away from adventuring parties and focused on the single hero adventure. This year's Role-Playing Game of the Year is Anvil of Dawn, developed by DreamForge Intertainment and published by New World Computing. It allows the player to assume the role of any one of five different heroes and play the game in first-person from that hero's perspective.

The magic system emphasizes seven different magical disciplines (each with three or four spells) and doesn't overburden the player with redundant spells. Instead, like the rest of the game, the focus is upon playability. Also, the game is enriched with skill-



based development. The more you use the talents possessed by your hero, the more they develop. Playability and balance make Anvil this year's winner in a year where both finalists are Kill Foozie games (where the sole goal is defeating an Ultimate Bad Guy) and both finalists are 3-D first-person games.

The other finalist was Interplay's Stonekeep, nominated for its beautiful SGI rendered characters and fascinating story development, but limited because of the number of CGW readers who couldn't fight past the bugs. It is a tribute that, even with the bugs, we perceived Stonekeep as a milestone in computer role-playing games.



The Anvil of Dawn team. We think the guy in back was in charge.

Readers' Choice: Stonekeep, Interplay

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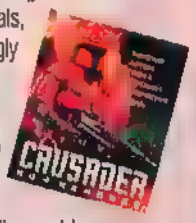
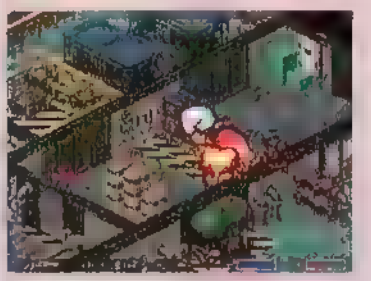
ACTION GAME OF THE YEAR

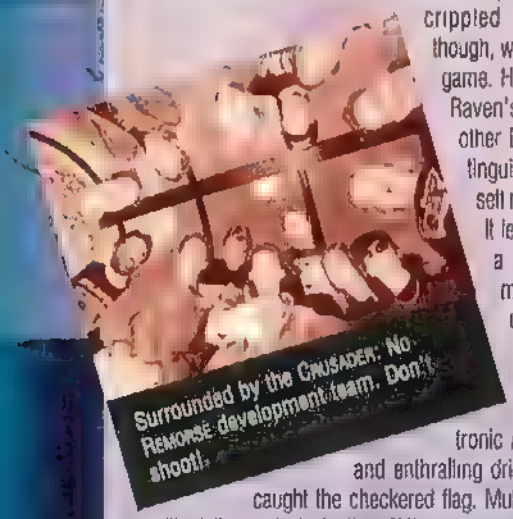
Successful action games are the ones that send you into an environment so real that you find yourself literaly ducking around corners, grunting with exertion and living as your on-screen avatar. Imagine the adrenalin rush that comes with rushing forward into a dark tunnel, your shotgun dancing in the bloody light of the wall's red alert signals, while you wait for the first mech to rear its ugly metallic head so you can destroy it with a shower of hot fire and cold steel.



This year's Action Game of the Year, Origin's CRUSADER: NO REMORSE, provides just such a rush, reeling you into a blood pumping world of explosions, burning bodies and laser-crossing. As a reformed trooper who's seen the light, you decide to infiltrate the evil facilities of the government, wreaking havok and engaging in guerilla warfare to destroy the government's infrastructure. Beautifully rendered isometric SVGA graphics are backed by an amazing variety of weapons to choose from; automatic pistols, massive energy beam weapons, grisly shotguns, three types of mines, and other weapons of mass destruction. At every level, you'll find challenges beyond the visceral combat, such as floor puzzles to decipher and alarms to dismantle. At the heart of the game, though, is unadulterated, vicious, immersive fun.



CRUSADER faced a tough challenge from the other finalists. We spent many hours playing DARK FORCES from LucasArts which took DOOM to the evil Empire and the Death Star, where we battled Boba Fett, Darth Vadar and a host of Storm Troopers. What ultimately crippled this dark romp though, was its lack of a save game. HEXEN, the sequel to Raven's HERETIC, was another DOOM bloodfest distinguished by its fantasy setting and the fact that it let you play as either a fighter, priest or mage, each with unique attributes and weapons. Finally, THE NEED FOR SPEED, Electronic Arts' incredibly fast and enthralling driving game, almost caught the checkered flag. Multiple courses with distinctive feels, brilliant SVGA graphics, and some of the hottest iron on the road made this 3DO conversion a worthy entry into the PC action game arena.


Surrounded by the CRUSADER: NO REMORSE development team. Don't shoot!

Readers' Choice: CRUSADER: NO REMORSE, ORIGIN

SPORTS GAME OF THE YEAR

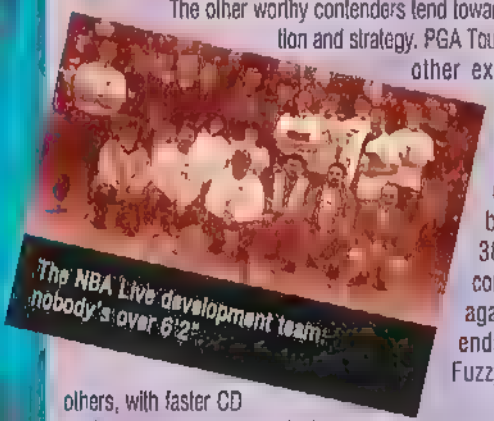
For the first time in four years, we have a winner other than FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL. While Patrick Cook's brainchild is still the best pigskin simulation available, it received little more than a graphic upgrade this season–leaving the field open for a new champion.

Certainly, this year's winning NBA LIVE was every bit as innovative as the original FPS FOOTBALL, bringing for the first time the true feel of action-oriented basketball to the PC. The licensing fee paid by EA Sports was well spent, as almost every NBA hoops hero outside of Michael Jordan was included: you can duplicate Barkley's low-post moves; take soaring jumpers as Mitch Richmond; rebound ferociously as Dennis Rodman–complete with the patented carrot-top hairdo.

The real surprise though is the accuracy of the statistical information. Patrick Ewing and Hakeem Olajuwon are always among the scoring leaders, Rodman gets his share of rebounds, and John Stockton racks up league-leading assists. When you add in the gorgeous high-res views and the addictive flow of play–nasty fouls, blocked shots, quick hands creating steals–NBA LIVE is simply the best blend of sports action and simulation currently available.

Another EA Sports game that consistently leads the competition in its category is finalist NHL HOCKEY. But the '96 version, while still the best hockey game, fails to reach the heights of NBA LIVE, despite the on-rink action and upgraded graphic look.

The other worthy contenders tend toward pure simulation and strategy. PGA TOUR GOLF '96, another example of EA Sports' dominance in this category, echoes the beauty of LINKS 386, and adds competition against golf legends Tom Kite, Fuzzy Zoeller and others, with faster CD loading times and a better AI than last year's model. TROPHY BASS by Sierra rewards patient gamers with the best fishing simulation yet. And TITLE FIGHT PRO BOXING may be from a small company, Comp-U-Sports, but it boasts a heavyweight boxing simulation punch, realistically recreating professional pugilists from Joe Louis to Iron Mike Tyson. Our congratulations to these finalists, and to the winner NBA LIVE, for its creativity and sense of sheer fun in a competitive arena.


The NBA Live development team: nobody's over 6'2"

Readers' Choice: NHL HOCKEY '96, ELECTRONIC ARTS

GAME OF THE YEAR!

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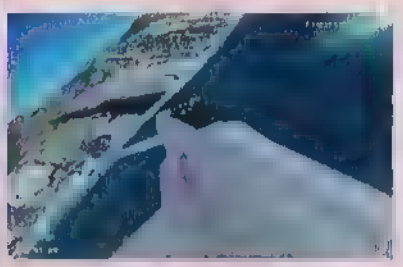
SIMULATION OF THE YEAR

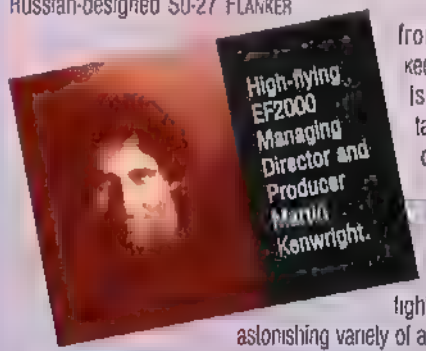
Simulation games are based on the modeling of vehicles in real-world environments. Typical sims put you in the cockpit of fighter aircraft, behind the wheel of a 230 mph-plus race car, or at the con of a submarine stalking its prey. The successful simulation balances a high level of realism with *fun*, not tedious, gameplay.

In this year's winner, EF2000, developers Ocean and DID manage to provide that winning balance. The Eurofighter 2000's systems are modeled in fantastic detail, from the AWACS downlink to the wide variety of available weapons systems. The flight model does a good job of making you feel like you really are flying an advanced, fly-by-wire fighter jet. The ground-breaking terrain and aircraft graphics don't hurt, either. The innovative dynamic campaign engine—especially the fully functional version in the EF2000 2.0 patch—gives this sim lasting play value.



This year's finalists provided tough competition. ADVANCED TACTICAL FIGHTERS, from Electronic Arts' Jane's Combat Simulations line, makes up for its aging engine by providing the best multiplayer environment of any modern sim. The variety of aircraft available for network play is amazing. FIGHTER DUEL, from Philips, deserves special note for its superb modeling of top World War II fighters and its sweat-inducing head-to-head play.

INDYCAR 2, from Papyrus (now a division of Sierra), takes the already excellent INDYCAR design and adds much improved driver AI that makes the race to the checkered flag all the more gut-wrenching. We also admired the graphics, which were supercharged to SVGA resolution, but we have to admit the remarkable variety of crashes was part of what kept us glued to the screen. Finally, the Russian-designed SU-27 FLANKER from SSI should keep the ultra-realism fans entertained while they continue the vigil for FALCON 4. This simulation of the Russians' hottest fighter includes an astonishing variety of allies and targets in the air and on the ground, as well as extremely challenging computer pilot AI. The outstanding mission editor built into the game has resulted in a variety of challenging freely-distributable scenarios, available across the net.



Readers' Choice: EF2000, OCEAN/DID

SPACE SIMULATIONS

Creating a successful space simulation is tough indeed. Without a convincing back story and a passing nod to scientific theory, an attempt at a space simulation can quickly degenerate into a 3-D shoot-em-up action game. The successful space simulation manages to create a science-fiction environment—both in the universe portrayed on the screen and the underlying back-story—that's convincing enough to immerse you in the game experience. While the experience may be pure fantasy, the successful space sim simulates its imaginary universe to a degree that you can suspend disbelief and be drawn in.

It's this rich, enthralling universe that makes Activision's MECHWARRIOR 2 our Premier Space Simulation of the Year. Designers Sean Vesce and Zachary Norman had the advantage of a pre-existing, richly documented universe to draw on, as MECHWARRIOR 2 is based on FASA's BATTLETECH universe. But what makes this more than just a giant robot game is the designers' superb adaptation of that universe. A few missions into the game and you'll really feel like you have a stake in the continued success of the Wolf or Falcon clan. The occasional trial by combat as you advance through the ranks is a brilliant touch. Along with missions that are far from routine, the richly modeled physical universe packed with working mines, city traffic, and other realistic touches draws you in. Also notable is MECHWARRIOR 2's extravagant support for joystick, throttle, and rudder configurations—no sim, space or otherwise, has offered this much control over control. Once you've won for your side, you can replay as the other clan and try to rewrite history. And you'll want to do just that.

WING COMMANDER IV was another finalist in this nascent category. While the basic structure and in-space gameplay closely resembles its predecessor in the series, WC IV features a wrap-around cinematic engine where your decisions actually affect the outcome of the game. Also factoring in WC IV's favor are a fine-tuned space combat engine, a tightly crafted story where all is not what it seems, and some of the best cinematography yet in interactive film.

How many people it takes to build a giant robot: the MECHWARRIOR II crew.

Readers' Choice: MECHWARRIOR 2, ACTIVISION

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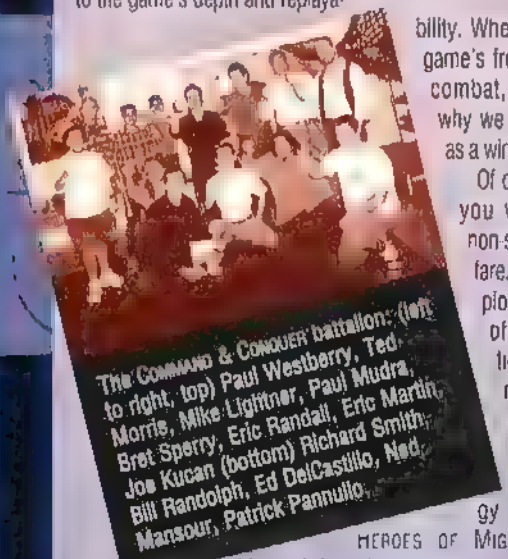
STRATEGY GAME OF THE YEAR

Building an empire to span the globe, raising a civilization to stand the test of time, sending an army on a march of destruction that would make the great Khan Gengh's jealous—these are goals strategy gamers reach for. To create and manage a world that reacts and moves to your every command speaks to the control freak in all of us. Throw a few challenges in, and we're practically foaming at the mouth to prove our skills as commanders and managers against any enemy in our way.

The challenges in the past year have been abundant. We could spend weeks playing any of this year's finalists for the Strategy Game of the Year Award. In fact, the field was so crowded with entertaining games that the award ended in a tie, between COMMAND & CONQUER and HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC.

COMMAND & CONQUER, from Westwood Studios and Virgin Interactive Entertainment, is an outstanding descendant of DUNE II. It's real-time combat forces you to work furiously to pick off enemy forces, pursue them around the globe and grind their armies into dust. Some gamers will argue that the real-time action degenerates to mob warfare, but half of the fun is watching your horde throwing themselves recklessly at the enemy.

In addition, Westwood designers equipped the opposing forces of the Global Defense Initiative and NOD Brotherhood with different types of units, imbuing each with distinct characteristics which add to the game's depth and replayability. When you add in the game's frenzied multiplayer combat, it's easy to see why we picked this game as a winner.

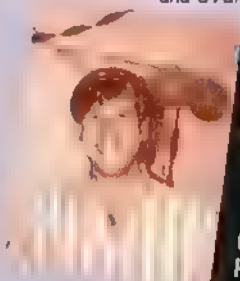


The COMMAND & CONQUER battalion: (left to right, top) Paul Westberry, Ted Morris, Mike Lightner, Paul Mudra, Bret Sperry, Eric Randall, Eric Martin, Joe Kucan (bottom) Richard Smith, Bill Randolph, Ed DelCastillo, Ned Mansour, Patrick Pannullo.

Of course, sometimes you want more than non-stop real-time warfare. So for the careful plotting and strategy of global domination, with a mix of resource management and exploration, we turn to our other Strategy winner, HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC. A faint descendant of the classic KING'S BOUNTY, also by New World Computing, HEROES is a game with near-endless gameplay. You play as one of four classes: Knight, Barbarian, Sorceress or Warlock, working to expand from one castle to rule every town on the map. Along the way, you explore the vast world, collecting treasures, fighting monsters, capturing towns and mines, and building up your castles so they can produce the finest troops and magic. But the game is more than just exploration and town building. There are three other warlords to contend with, each of whom have built armies and castles of their own. As you lead your heroes and their armies against your enemies, you'll face challenging AI and be forced to take a variety of different strategies to achieve your goals. HEROES will challenge you to think and plan, and it will reward you with hours of sheer pleasure. It is one of the most addictive games to come along in years.

This was such a good year for strategy games that there were four other finalists that could have won had the competition not been so strong. CAESAR II surpassed the original with SVGA graphics and an actual combat module. The entire package of three-tiered gaming will take you from city management to province control to appeasement of Caesar himself at the empire level. FANTASY GENERAL is a game that continues the GENERAL line from SSI, and is addictive and deep enough to be the true heir to PANZER GENERAL's throne. With five continents to play on, four heroes, smart AI, and myriad fantasy troops, FANTASY GENERAL easily offers more than 100 hours of gameplay.

WARCRAFT II is another real-time strategy game with insanely addictive properties, especially when played over a network. This sequel to WARCRAFT: ORCS VS HUMANS lets you take the reigns of Orc or Human leadership to wipe out your adversaries once and for all. With larger maps, a scenario editor, new sea and air troops and SVGA graphics, WARCRAFT II will keep you glued to the computer for hours on end. Finally, WARHAMMER: SHADOW OF THE HORNED RAT is a real-time strategy game with all the richness of the Warhammer tabletop game. With a carefully conceived magic system, fantastic menagerie of troops, some role-playing elements, and branching missions, this early entry in the Windows 95 strategy game stable is likely to keep you single-tasking on its screen.



Versatile Jon VanCaneghem: not only the designer of HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC, but also New World Computing's President.

Readers' Choice: COMMAND & CONQUER, WESTWOOD/VIRGIN

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Circle Reader Service #39

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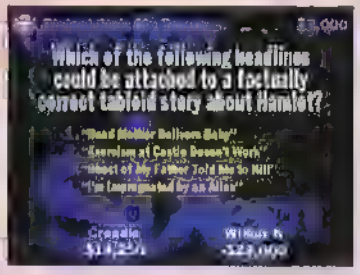
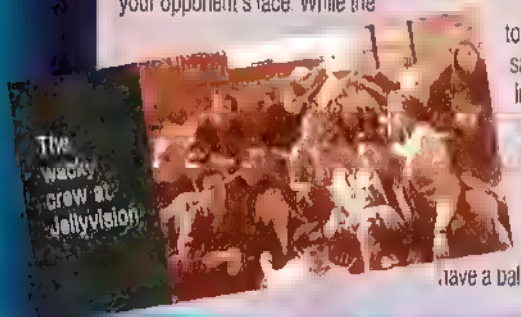
CLASSICS/PUZZLES

It's taken years for Puzzle and Classic parlor and board games to come into their own. But this year the category made up for its lack of quantity with some great games. The finest example of this was the saucy, irreverent You Don't Know Jack by Berkeley Systems. This game makes

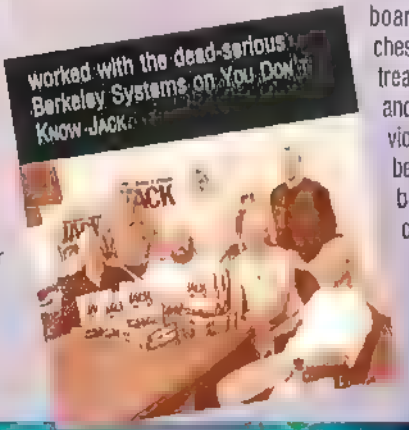


burger patties of those sacred cows of pop culture TV game shows. Jack has a surprising level of interactivity for a trivia game: it's great fun watching people yell on answers at parties, and the "Screw your neighbor" option throws tough questions in your opponent's face. While the tone may be too sarcastic and the innuendo too much for some, anyone who's ever wanted to see game shows skewered will have a ball with this.



Another game with a fresh perspective is the Discovery Channel's Connections. It's at least as pretty as Myst but Connections is a puzzle game–and a tough one at that. As in his TV show, James Burke weaves the most seemingly disparate facts from history, science and philosophy into a coherent and invariably interesting whole. That you enjoy yourself so much you hardly realize that you're learning is a tribute to the design.

The other finalist is a pleasant surprise–Monopoly, that venerable board game so abused on the computer. It didn't seem fair that the world's most well-known classic board game (except for chess, of course) should be treated so shabbily. Virgin and Westwood Studios obviously felt the same way, because they made this the best conversion to the computer yet.



Readers' Choice: The Incredible Machine 2, Sierra

SPECIAL ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FOR PHYSICAL MODEL

In the past, flight simulations have done a good job of making you feel like you're actually controlling an aircraft—as long as you stick to certain common maneuvers. Looking Glass Technologies' FLIGHT UNLIMITED extends the experience by dramatically improving the flight model. The model uses "Real-Time Computational Fluid Dynamics" to simulate the flow of air across the plane's surfaces, allowing the sim to recreate nearly any maneuver possible with a real plane. You can now experience engine torque, rudder-induced roll, gyroscopic effects on yaw and pitch, and even yaw caused by spiral airflow from the propeller washing against your vertical stabilizer. Or just enjoy a quiet soar down the ridge line—a truly Zen experience. Kudos to Looking Glass and designer/programmer Seamus Blackley for taking flight games higher into the realm of simulation.

SPECIAL AWARD FOR TECHNICAL ACHIEVEMENT

The dark side of PC gaming has always been getting the hardware configured so all games play equally well. Windows 3.1 got the hardware configuration down, but performance was too lethargic for most gaming use. Microsoft's "Manhattan Project" brought the simplicity of Windows hardware configuration together with the raw performance of DOS. The DirectX Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) allow game developers to write Windows 95 native games without having to write to the specific hardware, while still providing performance as good as typical hardware-level coding.

We haven't seen many DirectX-aware titles yet, but look for many this fall and Christmas season. With the level of support Microsoft has garnered from software and hardware vendors, the day of the plug-and-play game finally looks to be dawning. And that is most deserving of an award.

SPECIAL AWARD FOR TECHNICAL ACHIEVEMENT

Action and sports gamers can finally play the same game on one PC with the Advanced Gravis' GrIP. With a Multiport, a unit with four 9-pin GrIP sockets, and at least two GrIP controllers, action gamers suddenly have both a high-resolution computer monitor and a responsive game controller for each player. Now, four-player games around the same computer are not only possible, but preferable. Hats off to Gravis.

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What you loathe, you will worship.
What you ravage, you will rule.
What you are, you will abandon.

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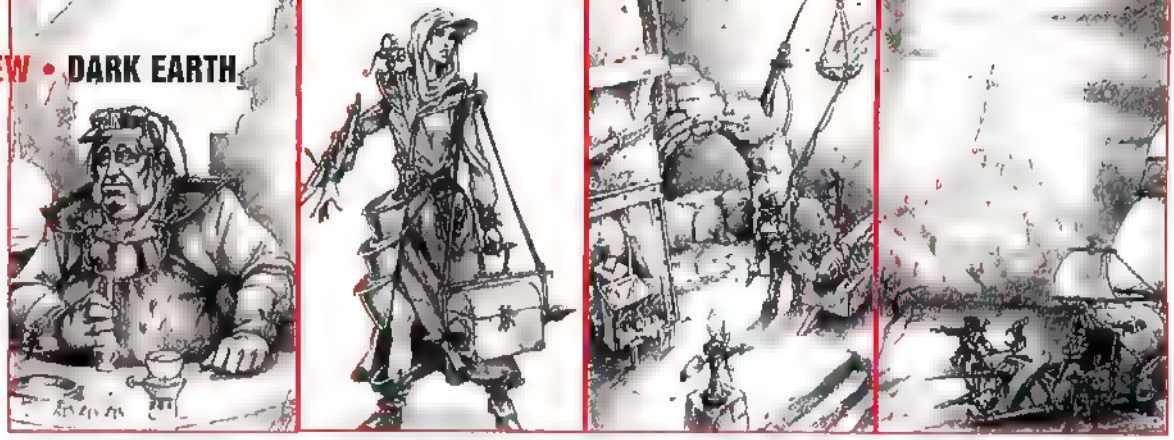


Old World, New Tech, Dark Future

SNEAK PREVIEW

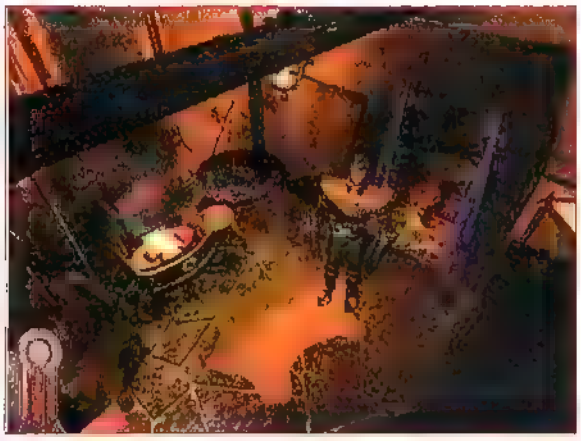
Mindscape's DARK EARTH *Paints Brilliant Visuals of a Dark Future*

by Johnny L. Wilson

In Europe, those who face the challenges of the present are overburdened by the glory of the past. In modern France, this is particularly true. The buildings of the colonial era with the *masquerades* (stone faces set above first-floor windows) and neoclassica masterpieces of the Second Empire rest as uncomfortable reminders that the French culture of today doesn't permeate as far throughout the world as did that of the colonial era, Napoleonic conquests. To speak of French culture conjures visions of turn of the century Impressionist painters and musicians or the early 20th-century Existentialist philosophers, a cafe society of the past rather than progressive visionaries of the present. Even in French music/video stores, visitors are likely to see more emphasis on the latest trends from the U.S. than the modern equivalents of Debussy in music or Cocteau in film.

Even in, or perhaps especially in, computer games, this is true. Baltimore's Sid Meier is better known than any of the designers at Ubisoft, Infogrames, Cryo, Delphine, Psygnosis (Paris) or Mindscape (Bordeaux). This Christmas, that may not be so true. 3-D technology in France is so advanced and so stunning that the new French software teams are likely to become known as a new "school" of artists in much the same way as the Impressionist or Expressionist schools of the past were known. The spiritual heirs of ALONE IN THE DARK and OUT OF THIS WORLD are on their way, and they look marvelous. Further, they not only *look* marvelous, but their designers want them to *play* marvelously, as well.

DARK EARTH, Mindscape Bordeaux's venture into the 3-D graphic adventure market, is at the forefront of this new wave of French artistry. Even if this game universe was not giving birth to a network television series, its own line of novels, and a strategy game to follow the adventure, it would be something special. Not only may it serve as a key product in defining this new wave of French culture, but it does so by building on the strengths of France's past. The French understanding of medievalism, the prescient visions of a



ARKHAN ASYLUM: The game begins in the bedroom of Arkham, [illegible] of the. This shot shows the many [illegible] visible in the game.

Jules Verne, a sense of science reflecting post-revolutionary France as a center of reason, and the French artistic traditions related to light *all* contribute to the richness of the DARK EARTH universe.

JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE LIGHT

The DARK EARTH world is our world three centuries in the future, after a calacysmic brush with a comet that nearly duplicates the meteorite storms posited in modern dinosaur theory. Put far too simply, many scientists feel that a series of meteorites impacted the surface of the earth, causing volcanic eruptions and geological upheaval. The result was that the atmosphere was thick with enough ash, dust and gaseous pollutants that the positive effects of the sun were blocked, an ice age encroached, and the warm-blooded species like the dinosaurs were destroyed.

DARK EARTH uses a similar set up. The meteors hit, geological calamities are followed by atmospheric devastation, photosynthesis stops, poisonous clouds drift through much of the world, and 98.6 percent of the world's population dies. The remainder of the human population assembles under rare pockets of light where they build feudal city-states called *Stallites*. Between the Stallites, only mutated creatures and deadly bands of brigands travel.

With the bulk of human population destroyed, so is the bulk of scientific and technological knowledge. A civilization analogous to those of the Dark Ages develops, where the masters of faith and/or superstition and the masters of force and/or oppression form a hierarchy to rule the remainder of humanity. It seems almost axiomatic that for a French design team to place a religious hierarchy in both roles. Remember that during the French Revolution, the assets of the Church were taken from the priests because of the Church's role in supporting the decadent monarchy. Only with Napoleon do we see some of these assets returning to the Church.

Obviously, in a world where much of the planetary surface is covered by deadly darkness and icy cold, and the most habitable places for survival are pockets where the sun peeks through the cloud layer, the dominant religion is likely to be based on sun worship. The Sunseers are a priestly caste who lead the worship of the Sun God (Great Solaar). They are also the ruling caste through their Council of the Seven. This group, analogous to priests throughout history, supervises food distribution, civic sanitation (through various spiritual cleaning expeditions) and dispense "divine" justice.

The "Church" of Dark Earth also has its enforcers, the Guardians of Fire. These are the security forces, municipal utilities (keeping the torches lit to provide light and the braziers stoked to provide heat), firefighters, and communications specialists (via a series of giant mirrors atop each Stallite dome). They also provide research and development of each Stallite's primitive technology.

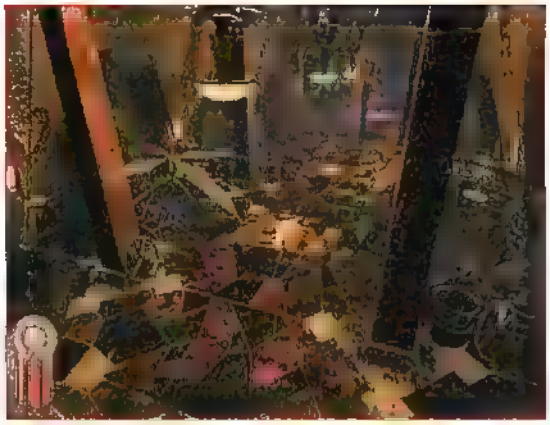
Add to these upper castes the roles of Builders (craftsmen and the proletariat), Providers (hunters and farmers against the odds), and Scavengers (the disenfranchised who sift through the waste and ruins of the universe in order to eek out survival).

A TRIP TO THE GLOOM

Naturally, the set-up of the universe would lead one to believe that existing in this world is the cliche' goal of recognizing the ongoing battle between light and darkness as good and evil, and then aiding the side of light (or good) as it strives to win the ultimate battle. According to Guillaume Le Pennec, the design director who is leading the DARK EARTH project, that would be an erroneous assumption. While it is true that there is an ongoing struggle between light and dark, it is not true that they are equivalent to good and evil. The world of DARK EARTH is a world of grays and, the deeper the player gets into it, the more gray it becomes.

FIRE FIGHTERS: In addition to keeping the peace, maintaining the laws, and fighting fires, [illegible] of Fire train for war [illegible] traditional [illegible]

Le Pennec prefers to speak of the ongoing struggle within the land as that of light versus shadow. He hints that they may be closer to symbols of life and death, but wisely notes that death is not always evil. Within the course of the game, the player tries to puzzle out the meaning of light and shadow through events that point to a



"secret history"—an exposition of the world's story in much the same vein of the way Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* built a secret history around the Templars. Once the player begins to explore this secret history, the possibility of magic, or at least the supernatural, begins to unfold.

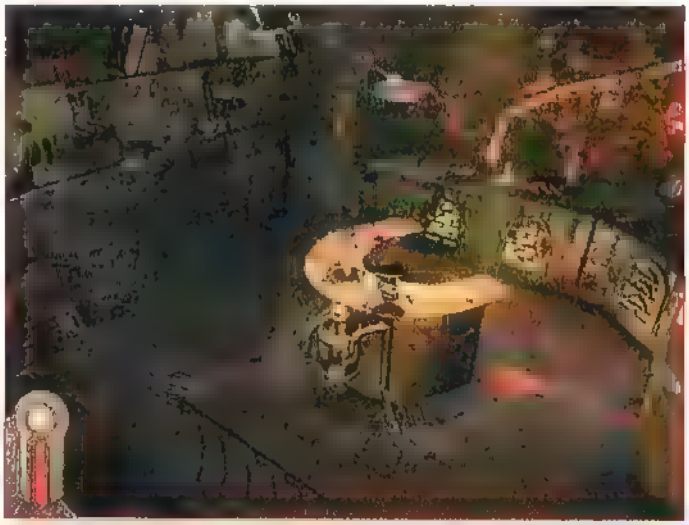
The great news for gamers about this constant interplay between light and shadow is that the game has a very different look from any adventure game we've played before. The monsters aren't the troll and orc derivatives of the Tolkienesque, but are semi-logical extrapolations of mutations that could occur to flora and fauna with which we are already comfortable. The forces of magic are not drawn from the eclectic aggregate of primitive western and oriental pantheons, they are fresh applications of past human superstition with a dash of extraterrestrial speculation thrown in for spice. As a result, the look of the game is neither restricted to underground tunnels nor medieval castles. Instead, the machines are a cross between Jules Verne and the French designers of the early industrial age.

"From the beginning," says Le Pennec, "we wanted to be able to play with the look between light and shadow. The technology we're using allows us to have multiple light sources on the 3-D characters and, depending on the light sources, sometimes, multiple shadows." In a world where light is so important, it is important that the play of light be as prominent in the graphics as it is in the story. Dark Earth's designers have accomplished this by designing costumes for the Sunseers that have all sorts of reflecting pieces of glass, jewels and metal upon them so that you get to see marvelous effects when they hit the light. Of course, the weapons play off the light sources, as well. Further, there are times when your character is the bearer of the light source; this is even more vividly illustrated.

Even if you don't care for the mythical/philosophical storyline, you have to be impressed with the visual look of this game. The perspective is a three-quarter overhead view similar to CRUSADER: NO REMORSE, but the resolution seems higher because the detail on the characters is amazing. Rich texture maps define the characters so that the look is one of incredible realism. The animation is superb—light years beyond the crude movements of RELENTLESS and ECSTATICA because the design team uses both traditional and motion-captured animation to make the movement as realistic as possible. The rooms are detailed environments with beautiful objects and lighting effects to show off the game's art.

The game also features location based and content-based music to enhance the experience. Frederic Motte has been an electronic musician for quite a while. He already had a reputation as "Moby" in the worlds of French underground music and software before coming to Mindscape Bordeaux. He seems determined to add to his reputation with the DARK EARTH soundtrack.

Unsatisfied with the simple use of location-based themes (where each room has its own musical theme), he has arranged the themes of each room so that they can segue into each other as your character moves from room to room. It is extremely effective and offers the illusion of real space. For instance, the hero's room



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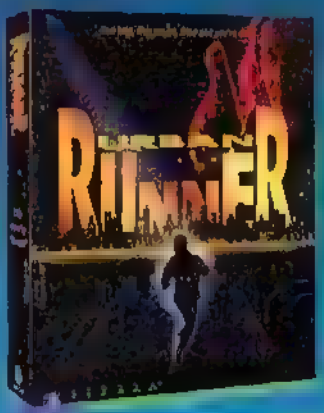
Truth. **Innocence**. They don't mean a thing if you're **dead**!

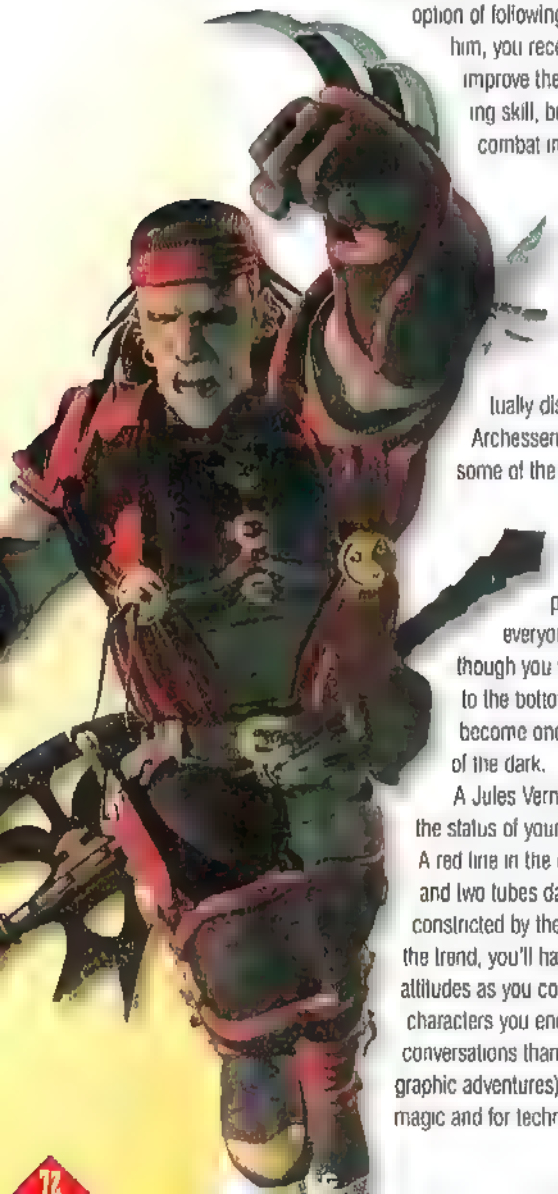


SIERRA

has a cool jazz theme that segues into a martial theme as he moves into the military hall of the Guardians of Fire. Further, he has added fighting themes with a heavy percussive feel, and magical themes to reflect the appropriate moments within the game.

MYSTERIOUS ARKHAN

Of course, all the artistic detail and conceptual brilliance of the world will come to nothing if the game play isn't right. In DARK EARTH, you control Arkhan, one of the Guardians of Fire. You move him through the world using the front, left, right, and back keys on the keyboard much like you controlled the character Twinsen in RELENTLESS. The difference, besides the game universe, is that you are not on as linear of a game track with Arkhan as you were with Twinsen. With Twinsen, you basically had to solve each puzzle in a set order so that you could move on. With Arkhan, you encounter more friendly characters than Twinsen did, and you have more options in responding. For example, right after you leave Arkhan's sleeping quarters, you encounter your martial arts trainer. He tells you that he has time for a lesson, but you have the option of following him or not. If you follow him, you receive training that will not only improve the attributes behind your fighting skill, but will familiarize you with the combat interface.



At first, your goal is mere exploration, but soon you discover that you have been contaminated by a black, porous, ice-cold ooze of parasitical substance which you will eventually discover is called Shankr Archessence (to reveal more is to spoil some of the effect). Once contaminated, you will discover that you are mutating into one of the monsters from which you protect the Stallite. You find everyone shrinking from you as though you were a leper. You have to get to the bottom of the story before you become one of the vampire-like creatures of the dark.

A Jules Verne-esque thermometer shows the status of your life force and contamination. A red line in the center symbolizes life force and two tubes darken around it as your life is constricted by the contamination. To reverse the trend, you'll have to choose postures and attitudes as you converse with the supporting characters you encounter (there are many more conversations than we've seen in most 3-D graphic adventures); discover what passes for magic and for technology within this universe;

BASTA MAN! The characters in movement, both of the characters to be [illegible] sequences which unfold the story [illegible] of Dark Earth.

and engage in combat.

Combat is extremely satisfying. The artificial opponents are (at this point in production) extremely tough to beat and the combat animation is the fastest we've seen. The basic moves (Parry, Duck, Kick and Strike) would be challenging enough, but there are some special moves to be encountered as you move through the game, as well. During combat, camera angles change a la ALONE IN THE DARK, but with a smoother effect and less disorientation than we experienced in the earlier game.

Finally, the secret history of DARK EARTH is revealed through 3-D cinematic sequences which blend SOFTIMAGE animation, motion-capture, and film techniques. If the rest of the game is stunning, these cinematic sequences are brilliant. Olivier Bailly-Maitre, the team leader on the cinematics, calls himself "Ed Wood" after the cheap film director of Hollywood's past, but the cinematic effects are nothing like Wood's cheap sets and meagre effects. These sequences serve as both reward and inspiration.

AROUND THE WORLD IN 3-D WAYS

With DARK EARTH, Mindscape Bordeaux appears to be raising the bar for 3-D entertainment. They are building a world through which it would be fascinating to adventure in no matter what technology was used, and they are enhancing it using the 3-D character of the presentation to help unfold the story as no other technology (FMV, traditional pixel-based animation, or low-res first-person point of view) could do. As early as we saw DARK EARTH, we can't know about the one critical part of the game—pacing. If you feel Arkhan's desperation and ticking biological time bomb as you play the game in the way we think you're going to feel it, this will be a great game. If not, it will merely be great technology. Either way, it stands to be one of the most talked about games for this Christmas. I certainly think Jules Verne would be proud.

Circle Reader Service #38

MAKING A SOUND DECISION

It's Easy To Find A Sound Card That Sounds Good, But Compatibility With Games Is The Real Trick

by Loyd Case

You'll be amazed how much better your games look with a good sound card and speakers. Sound like fuzzy logic? Perhaps it's not. Lucasfilm recently released a new version of *Star Wars* remastered for the high-end, Dolby THX sound system. When people were shown the two versions of *Star Wars*, with the original and new soundtracks, they were asked to rate the *image quality* of the picture. Even though the only thing that had changed was the soundtrack, people consistently picked the THX version as having better picture quality.

For the most immersive gaming experience, great audio is essential. For instance, the sounds in MechWarrior 2 and Zork Nemesis add enormously to the atmosphere. Clearly, however, if the sound card (and speakers) can't deliver a quality signal, then that immersive experience is diminished.

We took a look at a number of the latest sound cards, including several Plug and Play (PnP) cards and one General MIDI (GM) daughtercard. The good news is that these cards sound better than ever; even the lower-cost cards sound pretty good. The bad news is that Plug-and-Play is actually making life more difficult for DOS games (more on this in the reviews.)

CREATIVE LABS AWE32 PLUG-AND-PLAY

In looking at these sound cards, we took into account the installation headache factor, their sampled wave audio and GM sound quality, and game compatibility in DOS and Windows 95. In addition to playing a couple of games for general audio quality, we listened to three GM files.

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Shadows Over Riva is the stunning climax of the popular Realms of Arkania trilogy you have been waiting for. The full 360° 3D technology – combined with fully digitized music, speech and soundtrack features – will capture your imagination like nothing before.

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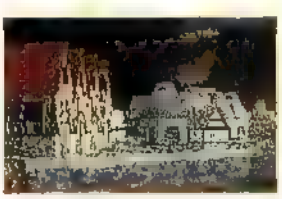

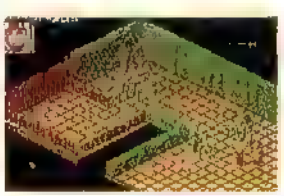

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Circle Reader Service #164

a Mozart solo piano piece, the theme from *Star Wars* and a generic fusion/rock piece with lots of electric instruments.

So without further ado, let's dive right in, shuffle the deck, and lay the cards on the table.

CREATIVE LABS AWE32 PLUG-AND-PLAY

The AWE32 sound card originally hit the streets over two years ago. Since then, it's gone through a couple of iterations, the newest being the PnP model. We checked out the full AWE32, which differs from the value edition in having a connector for a MIDI daughtercard, plus some additional software.

The digital audio section, which is usually responsible for speech and sound effects, sounded pretty clean, certainly cleaner than the old Sound Blaster 16. We checked out several Windows 95 games, including Activision's latest release, ZORK NEMESIS. Whatever the merits of the game, the audio in ZORK NEMESIS is very demanding, requiring a 16-bit sound card. The verdict: great speech and sound effects.

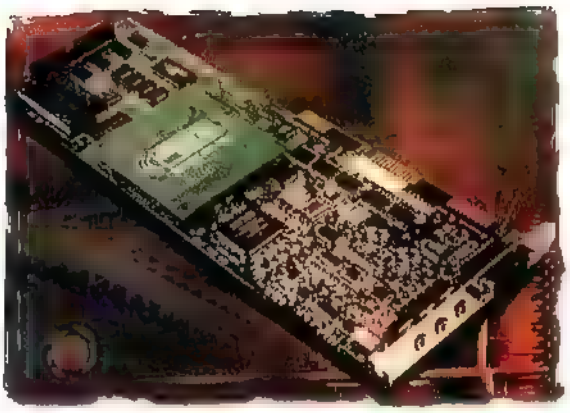
The built-in MIDI wavetable on the AWE was less impressive, however. With only one megabyte of wavetable ROM, compromises have to be made. The strings sounded thin and shrill, and the horns sounded just okay. The trumpet was weak, lacking fullness. The piano was pretty good, befitting the keyboard synthesizer legacy of the wavetable. However, the snare drum sounded downright awful and the kick drum was very muddy. GM sound quality can be improved in one of two ways: adding a GM daughtercard or adding RAM (the AWE has two memory slots.) There is a shareware, 2 MB GM patch set for the AWE available on CompuServe.

Installation was relatively straightforward, although we needed to go back to the Windows 95 Device Manager to manually adjust IRQ settings (but that beats setting jumpers.) Plug-and-play boards automatically select IRQ settings, but unfortunately they're rarely the "standard" settings that DOS games expect.

To run DOS games, you need to install a PnP driver, supplied by Creative Labs on floppy disk. Unfortunately, there's no mention of this in any of the documentation, only a README file on the disk itself, so be warned. Once you install the driver (which uses only 2 KB of memory), DOS games run just fine, either in Sound Blaster or AWE mode.

The AWE is pricey for what you get: a nice, clean digital audio section, a mediocre MIDI wavetable, a high degree of compatibility with most games, and lots of room for expansion (which adds to the cost, of course.)

ORCHID NUSOUND PLUG-AND-PLAY



ENSONIQ SOUNDSCAPE ELITE

ORCHID NUSOUND PLUG-AND-PLAY

Like the AWE, the Orchid NuSound is a PnP, wavetable-capable sound card with a highly compressed, 1 MB wavetable. Although a bit quirky (some of the instruments seemed very inaccurate), the overall wavetable sound was one of the best 1 MB sets we've heard. The digital audio section, based on the Crystal Semiconductor chipset, sounded pretty clean. The board also has built-in Spatializer 3-D sound capability, making for some interesting effects when playing games like DUKE NUKEM 3 D.

The installation was a bit problematic, though. The Crystal chipset has a problem with some Award PnP BIOS chips, so check for compatibility before buying. We tested on systems with both Award and AMI BIOS's. Running Award BIOS 4.50pg, the system refused to boot with the Orchid card. However, the AMI-based system ran just fine. After talking with several card vendors, it seems that the problem lies with the Award BIOS rather than the card itself.

Once running, the board installed without any problems. There were two very odd quirks during installation that could confuse some users, though. First, when installing the Windows 95 applications software (after installing the drivers and getting sound out of the system), the audio drivers were disabled and had to be reinstalled. Second, to run DOS games outside of Windows 95, you need to load a driver in the CONFIG.SYS file. This is well documented, but the manual also discusses some DOS utilities that are used to configure and adjust the card. Several of them are only available, however, if you *install from Windows 3.1*. There is no way to extract them if you only have Windows 95 (or a DOS-only system, for that matter).

One cool option for the NuSound is a front control panel that can be mounted in an available 3 1/2-inch drive bay. It has a little volume control, a couple of defeat buttons and all the connectors, right there in front.

The audio experience from our new Sound Blaster is so real, when you find out what you've been missing, you'll just die.

Life is too short to be stuck with an ordinary sound card. Whether you're a hard-core gamer or an audiophile, the new Sound Blaster® AWE32™ PnP is simply to die for.

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For the cost, the NuSound is a nice little card, but watch out for the installation quirks.

ENSONIQ SOUNDSCAPE ELITE

This is the one non-PnP card in the roundup (other than the daughterboard). Even so, installation was fairly straightforward. The only hitch was that the Windows 95 drivers shipped with the card didn't support Microsoft's DirectSound for Windows 95 games, but Ensoniq already has a new version up on various online services (look for build 44).

True to its high-end synthesizer legacy, the Ensoniq Wavetable sounded very clean, although the solo piano sounded a bit bright. The horn section was a little weak, but strings were great. Rock sounds played with a huge applied reverb, particularly on the kick drum. All in all, a very nice, 2 MB wavetable.

Digital audio was very clean—when it worked. Like many DSP-based boards, the Ensoniq uses software to download a Sound Blaster emulation program to the board, and that approach doesn't always work well. We could never get EA's ADVANCED TACTICAL FIGHTERS to run with the Ensoniq's Sound Blaster emulation—it would lock up solid. Most other games worked well. Quite a few of the more recent games ship with native Ensoniq drivers, but even that is no guarantee. While the TIE FIGHTER CD ran (and sounded) great, TERRA NOVA would properly autodetect the Ensoniq card, then never play speech or sound effects. These kinds of problems are really unfortunate, because the Ensoniq is a great-sounding card at a reasonable price. Check your DOS game library for compatibility before buying. Windows 95 games, however, sounded superb. Another plus is Ensoniq's above-average customer support, which is quite refreshing these days.

ADVANCED GRAVIS ULTRASOUND PLUG-AND-PLAY

Like two other boards in this roundup based on the new AMD Interwave chipset, the Gravis board had problems with the Award BIOS. Even when we used an AMI based system, the board was frustrating to set up and annoying to use. Ultrasound's installation and setup was by far the most complex of any board in our survey. Even when following directions explicitly, we never got MIDI to work in Windows 95, and had to resort to Windows 3.1 to run our MIDI tests.

ADVANCED GRAVIS ULTRASOUND PLUG-AND-PLAY

Unlike past Ultrasound cards, the Ultrasound PnP has a built-in wavetable. The built-in wavetable was rather mediocre, with a thin piano section, flat-sounding horns and an unimpressive drumset. Since we had the Pro version, which ships with additional RAM, we also tried it in "Gravis" mode. The sound quality here was considerably better.

Running with DOS games was, to put it bluntly, a nightmare. There are two different Sound Blaster emulation modes (one of which also supports GM), the Interwave mode (which has little or no support from DOS games currently) and the Ultrasound mode (available on only the Pro version). On top of that, you have to run a program called Prepgame for most DOS games, which would add drivers and update DOS extenders. While it sounds fairly good (when it works), this is no card for the technically faint-of-heart. We'd recommend avoiding this

DirectSound is the audio part of Microsoft's DirectX software toolkit for Windows 95 game developers. It's of concern to those of us playing Windows 95 games since you need to have the right driver to get DirectSound support. To the programmer, DirectSound appears to have the features of a rich, high-end sound card. The core of the DirectSound API (application programming interface) is the *hardware abstraction layer* (HAL), which can use whatever dedicated audio hardware a sound card has to offer, and off-loads the rest of the audio duties to the CPU.

There are two ways of supporting digital sound in Windows 95. One is through the normal multimedia audio mechanism (known as the Wave API, which first appeared in Windows 3.1), and the other is through DirectSound. The neat thing about DirectSound is its support for hardware acceleration, which is particularly critical for mixing sounds. As game audio gets more complex, titles will be mixing many discrete channels of sound in order to achieve a more immersive effect. Mixing audio, however, is CPU-intensive, and has to happen quickly (known as *low-latency*), and good sounds card will have an onboard hardware mixer that game programmers can directly access using DirectSound.

An interesting aspect of DirectSound is what it'll mean for Creative Labs, which has enjoyed market dominance thanks in large part to their Sound Blaster specification. Many legacy titles will still need Sound Blaster compatibility for audio, but DirectSound titles won't care if there's Sound Blaster-aware hardware in your PC. Creative makes good hardware, and has the lion's share of the sound card market, but now the playing field may level somewhat.

Additionally, future versions of DirectSound will support audio compression, allowing more digital sound to be stored in less space, and a 3-D sound API (see other sidebar).

The key to the best game experience under Windows 95 is to check with your sound card vendor to make sure their audio drivers support DirectSound.

You'll have to search the galaxy to find a more realistic multimedia experience than this.

There's not much doubt that intelligent life forms exist somewhere else in the universe. The question is: Are their multimedia systems as advanced as ours?

The new **Sound Blaster 8x Kits** make your current multimedia system seem like something out of a history book. They give you a brain blistering 8x CD-ROM drive that makes all your CD-ROM software perform at warp speed. The 8x drive uses an IDE interface and is compatible with multiple standards including Photo CD and CD EXTRA.

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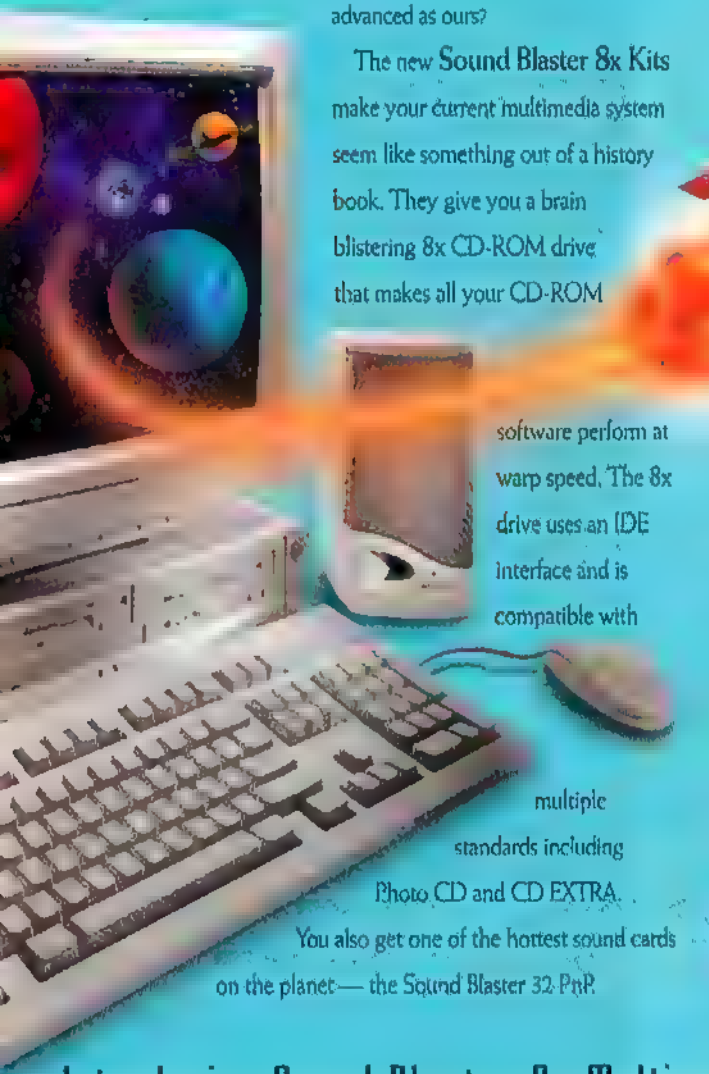

Since the search for bargains is universal, a fat collection of the hottest new games and software comes with every kit. Sound Blaster Performance 8x is designed for the multimedia fanatic Sound Blaster Discovery CD 8x takes the whole family to the cutting edge. Both come with a pair of Sound Blaster speakers powerful enough to attract low-flying spacecraft. If you're looking for the ultimate CD-ROM upgrade, Blaster CD 8x gives you mach speed and great software to boot.

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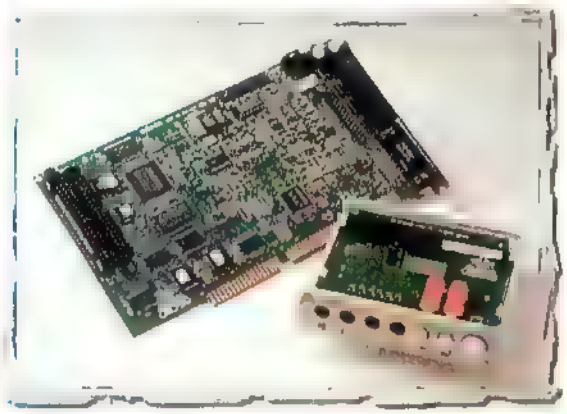
card unless you need some of Gravis' unique features.

CRYSTALAKE SERIES 140

CrystaLake is a fairly new company, and currently offers its cards via direct mail order. You can email your order or contact them on their non-toll free telephone number. Their high-end card, the 140, is very compelling, but has some quirks. Like two other cards in this roundup, the CrystaLake 140 doesn't work with the Award PnP BIOS. However, you can order it without PnP support, which works fine with the Award BIOS.

There are some problems with the software installation—one DOS setup file was missing. The README files on disk are quite technical, and require some careful interpretation. The manual is complete and clear, coming close to the AWE32 in thoroughness. The card has a whopping 4 MB of wavetable sounds and built-in SRS 3-D audio. The card uses the Crystal Semiconductor 4232 chip for digital sound. Overall, the digital audio was the cleanest of the bunch, even better than the AWE.

The GM sounds were superb. The piano was quite realistic, even



CRYSTALAKE SERIES 140

better than the Yamaha daughterboard to our ears. The horn section was terrific, as were the strings. The drum section was very tight and solid, and the electric bass was stunning. We'd give the Yamaha daughterboard an overall edge, but this is a very good wavetable card.

Once we installed the DOS driver, every game we threw at it ran quite well. DOOM 2, ATF, TERRA NOVA and WARCRAFT 2 all sounded great. Under Windows 95, CIVILIZATION 2 and ZORK NEMESIS yielded some of the most impressive sound we've ever heard out of a standalone card.

One other interesting feature for recording enthusiasts is the dual microphone inputs—very handy for true, digital stereo recording.

If you're willing to overlook some of the installation quirks and are willing to buy direct from a young but friendly company direct, this card bears investigation.

YAMAHA WAVEFORCE DBG50XG MIDI DAUGHTERCARD/ WAVEFORCE SW60XG WAVETABLE SOUND UPGRADE CARD

Unlike the other cards in this roundup, the Waveforce is not a standalone card—the DBG50 is a general MIDI daughtercard that requires a Waveblaster-style connector on a standard sound card. Yamaha's other offering is the SW60XG, an ISA board that fulfills the same role as its daughtercard cousin. The only difference is that the SW60 uses its own 18-bit digital to analog converter for its output, rather than going through a host sound card. The SW60's 18-bit resolution output makes for improved patch sound quality.

3-D Audio: Sound All Around

3-D isn't just for graphics anymore. There's been lots of buzz about 3-D technologies coming to a PC near you, and audio may very well be the next big thing. Some titles out there already implement crude versions of "2.5-D" audio, relying on volume and panning (left/right) to place sounds. While this method is a cheap way to apply some positioning to sounds in a game, the overall effect is less than convincing.

On the hardware side, some "3-D" technologies have already reached the market, including SRS, Spatializer, and QSound, among others. But none of these technologies have become a de facto standard, and few title developers write to any one of them. SRS and Spatializer have found their way into multimedia speakers, but the problem with speaker-based implementations is that the entire audio signal is processed, rather than specific parts.

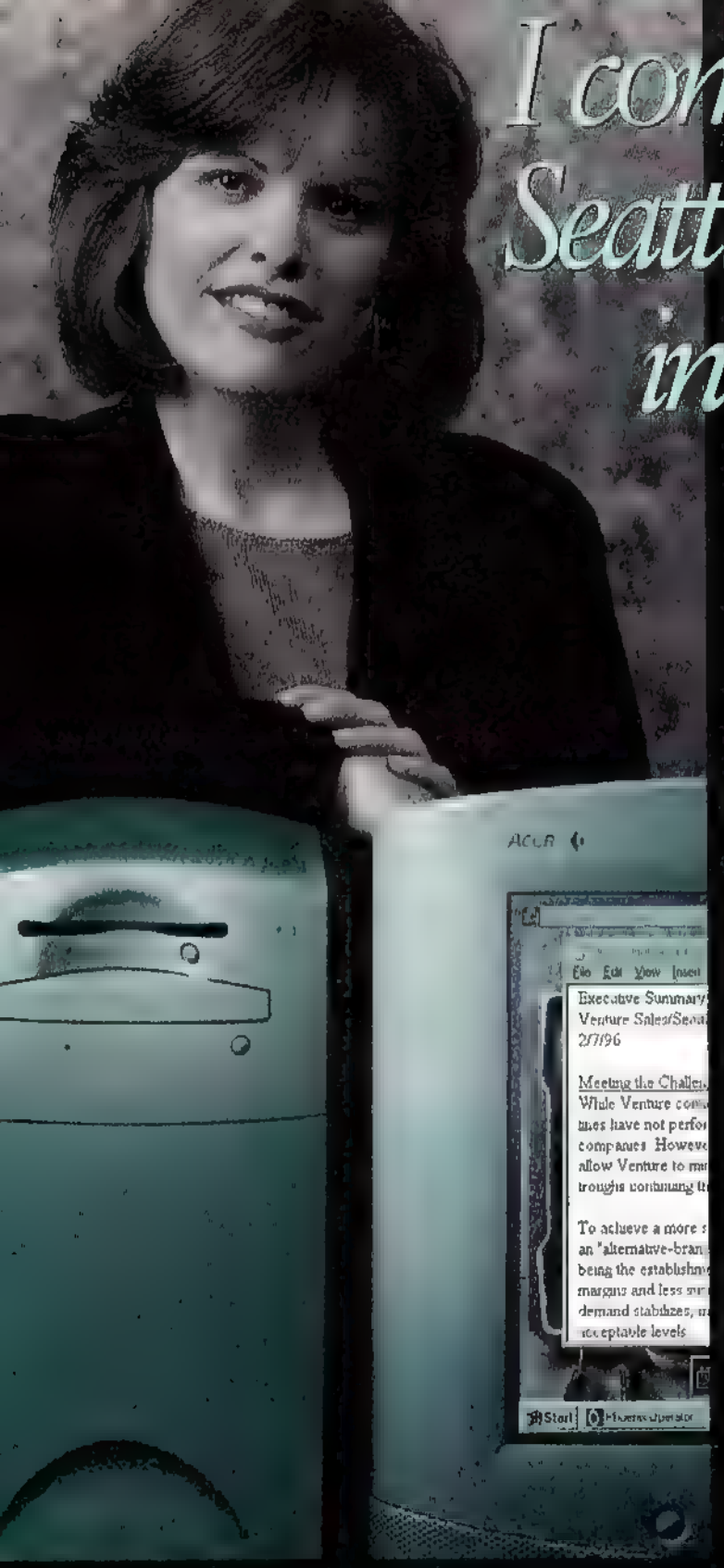
The term "3-D audio" has been the subject of much confusion and marketing spin, so let's clarify the different types of audio enhancement technologies out there.

First, there are stereo field extension or "spatializing" technologies, which let you perceive sounds anywhere in a 180-degree semicircle in front of you. This method can be applied in the speakers themselves, or a sound card can apply the effect before sending the signal on. Though relatively inexpensive, stereo field extension is basically a "non-positional" 3-D audio technology, and can't convincingly place sounds behind you.

Next are multispeaker array technologies like Dolby's AC-3, which currently requires five speakers and a sub-woofer. Rather than apply algorithms to approximate how we localize sound, multispeaker technologies direct sounds to specific speakers so that those sounds are physically located where we'd expect them to be. While this is a positional 3-D audio technology, it's a good deal more expensive than your garden variety pair of multimedia speakers.

The newest entry in the 3-D audio game on the PC is binaural rendering, championed by Crystal River Engineering (CRE). Humans use a number of cues to localize sounds, and binaural rendering applies effects to simulate these cues. While this positional 3-D audio technology can be very convincing, it can also be very CPU-intensive, and often requires a digital signal processor (DSP) to be on a sound card. Also, binaural rendering tends to be far more convincing when played through headphones rather than speakers.

Microsoft announced the Direct3-D Sound API at the recent Computer Game Developers' Conference, and while this API has positioning algorithms hard-coded into it, QSound, Spatializer, and CRE have their own APIs that can talk to DirectSound. These three players along with SRS all have processor chips that sound card vendors can add for positional processing, and Dolby is working on a two-speaker version of its AC-3 technology. It's rumored that Microsoft will be licensing CRE's positioning algorithms for the Direct3-D Sound API, though they declined to comment. It remains to be seen which of these technologies developers will embrace, but hopefully, game titles will be able to take advantage of whatever 3-D audio accelerator hardware is out there.—*Dave Salvator*



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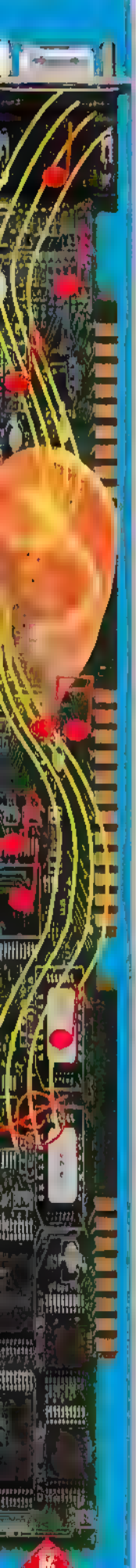
intel inside pentium PROCESSOR

Designed for Microsoft Windows 95



The DBG50 card can plug into a Sound Blaster 16 (not all models) or AWE32 (not the value edition), the NuSound card and any other card supporting a wavetable connector.

At a street price of about $160, it's a serious investment for an add-on. However, the Yamaha had the overall best MIDI sound of the lot. While the piano seemed a touch less realistic than the CrystaLake piano sound, it was full-bodied and rich. The only problem was the chording, which sounded more like bagpipes than piano. The clarinet and horns sounded quite good.

Yamaha has extended the GM standard with its proprietary XG (Extended General MIDI) specification. XG allows for additional simultaneous real-time effects beyond the stock chorus and reverb, like a screaming wah-wah pedal on an electric guitar. XG also increases extends the number of patch banks available to the synth engine, making for more available patches. While the demos for XG sound impressive, the only game we were able to find that supports XG is TERRA NOVA. GM music sounded great, but the XG demos were really stunning. It remains to be seen, however, whether or not Yamaha's XG will become a prevalent standard.

If you're in the market for a MIDI daughtercard, the XG definitely bears checking out. The price is slightly less on the street than the Roland SCD-15, our benchmark for GM, and the sound quality is just about as good.

BIG PICTURE...

Gaming audio is currently in a state of flux, with various 3-D sound schemes vying for attention (see sidebar) and even one game, WING COMMANDER IV, that supports Dolby ProLogic surround sound. Multimedia speaker quality has also made dramatic strides (see the March issue, and the CrystaLake speakers in this month's "READ.ME"), and is a key piece in the audio puzzle to delivering killer sound.

There seems to be a gradual shift away from GM to digital audio—in the form of Audio CD tracks—as multiple CD games become more prevalent, game designers now have the real estate to offer full digital music. The advantage here is guaranteed consistency in soundtrack quality rather than having to depend on varying quality wavetable synths or even poorer-sounding FM synthesis. Nonetheless, there's still a lot of GM support in current and future games, so having a solid wavetable adds to the overall gaming experience.

Of the cards we checked out, each seems to have its place. If you want guaranteed compatibility, Creative Labs' AWE32 is a good, albeit expensive choice. The Soundscape Elite comes from a company with a highly musical legacy, but it does have some drawbacks in the area of DOS game compatibility. The CrystaLake 140 is an impressive card from a young company that has its idiosyncrasies, but it's one of the better all-in-one solutions we've seen. The Orchid NuSound seems to be a solid card for those on a tight budget. About the only card we'd avoid is the Gravis Ultrasound PnP—it just requires too much work to become operational. The AWE32 with the Yamaha Waveforce daughtercard makes a nearly unbeatable combination—if you have an unlimited budget.

We've certainly come a long way since the days of the original Adlib Music Card, and the choices available to the gamer are better than ever. With any luck, the next time you play your favorite game, maybe, just maybe, the game will look a little bit better. The difference, though, will likely be in your ears.

Sound Card Feature Table

Company	Creative Labs	Orchid	CrystaLake	Gravis	Ensoniq	Yamaha
Model	AWE32 PnP	NuSound PnP	140	Ultrasound PnP	Soundscape Elite	Waveforce DBG50XG
SoundBlaster Compatibility Rating	4.5	4	4.5	1	2.5	n/a
Overall Sound Quality Rating	4	3	5	3	4	5
Plug-and-Play?	Yes	Yes	Yes (optional)	Yes	No	No
Sound Blaster Emulation	Yes, hardware	Yes, hardware + DOS driver	Yes, hardware + DOS driver	Yes, software only	Yes, DSP download only	No
Wavetable ROM Size / Type	1 MB / EMU8000	1 MB/Crystal	4 MB / Crystal	1 MB + disk-based RAM download on Pro models	2 MB / Ensoniq	4 MB / Yamaha
Chipset	Creative Labs	Crystal Semiconductor	Crystal Semiconductor	AMD Interwave	Ensoniq + DSPs	Yamaha
CD-ROM Interface(s)	IDE	IDE and Panasonic	IDE	IDE	IDE, Panasonic, Mitsumi and Sony	N/A
Expansion	MIDI daughtercard in some models, RAM expansion	MIDI daughtercard	No	RAM expansion in Pro model	No	N/A
Price	$249	$139	$299	$169	$159	$160
Website URL	www.creat.com	www.orchid.com	www.crystalake.com.80/~crystal/	www.gravis.com	www.ensoniq.com	www.yamaha.com
Phone	(408) 428 6600	(800) 7ORCHID	(503) 222 2603	(604) 431 5020	(800) 257 1439	(408) 467 2300
RS#	321	322	323	324	325	326

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to feed the fish.
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AGES 13+

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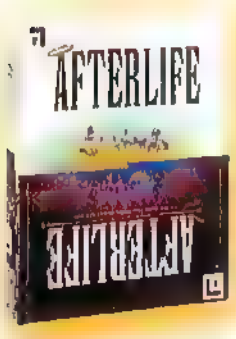

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Circle Reader Service #224

DOS Boot Tips For Win 95

Killer Configs For Running DOS Games Under Win 95

I've been answering a lot of e-mail questions lately about how to run DOS games under Windows 95. There seems to be a lot of confusion over the best way to run DOS games, how to set up the various configuration files and how to get the most out of low DOS memory. I thought I'd take some time to discuss how my system is set up—and why I do what I do.

First, a philosophical point: I run my DOS games from the DOS prompt, not from the Windows 95 desktop. I don't even want the slight performance hit incurred when running in DOS exclusive mode, and I certainly don't want the performance hit that occurs when running a DOS game as a Windows 95 app. I've always been pretty comfortable with the DOS command line, so I don't mind changing to the right directory and running a game. Even so, I *don't* like mucking around with my configuration files or creating a boot disk, just to get a game to run. So I've got my system running in a way that obviates the need for a boot disk.

Let's take a look at the files used to configure Win 95 as it's booting up. I'll explain each of them, and show the tweaks I've made to my system.

The first file of interest is MSDOS.SYS. In older versions of DOS, this was a binary file that was part of the DOS core, and was a hidden file that was loaded during the boot process. In Windows 95, it's still a hidden file, but now it's just a simple text file that contains various pieces of information that Win 95 needs when it boots. Here's my MSDOS.SYS file:

```
[Paths]
WinDir=C:\WIN95
WinBootDir=C:\WIN95
HostWinBootDrv=C

[Options]
BootMulti=1
BootGUI=0
Network=1
BootDelay=10
BootWin=1
DrvSpace=0
DblSpace=0
;(MSDOS.SYS needs to be
>1024 bytes).
<Bunch of XXX's... DON'T
DELETE THEM!!>
```

The important stuff is under the [Options] heading.

BootMulti=1 gives me the ability to boot back to DOS 6.22 if I want by pressing the F4 key at the "Starting Windows 95" message. Note that this line is meaningless if your system came pre-installed with Windows 95. *BootGUI=0* is a key parameter; it tells the system to *boot to the DOS prompt!* The DOS prompt you get is the Win 95 DOS prompt; the Windows environment never loads. I'll explain why later. *Network=1* turns on Win 95 networking.

BootDelay=10 means that Win 95 will pause 10 seconds at the "Starting Windows 95" message. The default is two seconds, which isn't enough time to decide between old DOS or Win 95. *BootWin=1* means that the default is to boot to Win 95; I have to take some action (press the F4 or F8 function keys) to do something different. Finally, *DrvSpace=0* and *DblSpace=0* makes sure that the disk compression drivers do NOT load. I don't use disk compression, but I've noticed on some systems the drivers load anyway, often taking up precious low memory.

GO CONFIGURE...

The next important file is CONFIG.SYS. Yes, it still exists, and it behaves much the same way as the old version did. CONFIG.SYS is where a lot of operating system parameters and DOS drivers are loaded. Win 95 supports multiple configurations, just like DOS 6. I've taken advantage of that feature in my own CONFIG.SYS file:

```
[common]
SET
LOADHIDATA=C:\QEMM\LOADHI.RF

[MENU]
MENUITEM=WIN95,WIN APPS
MENUITEM=DOS7 FUNSTUFF
MENUITEM=NOMEM,No MemMgr
MENUDEFAULT=WIN95,20

[WIN95]

[DOS7]
dev.ce=c:\qemm\qemm386.sys
ram be:n x=a000-c7ff
st:m s=ef00-efff s=ff00-ffff rf
```

> **"With this setup, I do have to reboot occasionally, but I've *never* had to use a boot disk."**

```
aram=d080-d1ff

DOS=HIGH
SHELL=C:\COMMAND.COM C:\
/E:1500 /P
BUFFERS=20
FILES=50

device=c:\qemm\loadh .sys /rf
C:\SCSI\ASPI8DOS.SYS /D
device=c:\qemm\loadhi.sys /rf
C:\SCSI\ASPICD.SYS /D:MSCD001
device=c:\qemm\loadhi.sys /rf
C:\WIN95\IFSHLP.SYS
device=c:\qemm\loadhi.sys /rf
C:\WIN95\SETVER.EXE

[NOMEM]
DEVICE=C:\WIN95\HIMEM.SYS

DOS=HIGH
buffers=20
files=50

device=C:\SCSI\ASPI8DOS.SYS /D
device=C:\SCSI\ASPICD.SYS
/D:MSCD001
```

There are three different configurations here. One is called WIN95, the second is DOS7 and the third is NOMEM. The default one (you can tell from the *menudefault* entry under the [MENU] heading) is Win95. The [MENU] heading is very important. If this is present, a menu appears for about 20 seconds, and lets me select which boot configuration I want to use by moving a cursor with the arrow keys and pressing ENTER.

There are no special drivers loaded under the Win95 entry. This is my normal Win 95 boot configuration, and I don't want *any* DOS drivers loaded. They actually slow down Windows 95 slightly, and the few DOS games I may run from the Windows desktop will run under Windows, and not need to run under MS-DOS exclusive mode.

The second entry, [DOS7], is what I boot to primarily for older DOS games. I use QEMM 8.0, but whatever memory manager entries can go here. This is where I load my DOS SCSI drivers. I also load some of the necessary Win 95 stuff, so I can still run Windows if I need it.

The third entry, [NOMEM], is an interesting one. My QEMM setup is very aggressive, freeing up over 600 KB of low DOS memory. Most of my older DOS games run great, but a few of the newer games that use DOS extenders don't run well under QEMM. However, they also don't require much lower DOS memory. So I have a configuration that loads all my DOS drivers low, and I don't run the Win 95 desktop with this boot setup. This gives me 515 KB of lower DOS memory, more than enough for most DOS extender games.

UND NOW VE BOOT...

By now, you've probably guessed that there's a corresponding AUTOEXEC.BAT file. You're right, and here it is:

```
@ECHO Off
SET SOUND=C:\SB16
SET BLASTER=A220 I5 D1 H5
P330 E620 T6
SET MIDI=SYNTH 2 MAP G
MODE 0

C:\SB16\DIAGNOSE /S
C:\SB16\AWEUTIL /S
C:\SB16\SB16SET /P /Q

PATH C:\WIN95;C:\WIN95\CO
MAND;C:\DOS;C:\QEMM  C:\NO R
TON
SET TEMP=C:\TEMP
SET LMOUSE=C:\LMOUSE
PROMPT $P$G

SET MGA=C:\MGA\SETUP\
call matrox.bat

GOTO %CONFIG%

:WIN95
win
GOTO END
:DOS7
c:\qemm\loadhi /rf C:\WIN95\CO
MAND\mscdex.exe /d:mscd001
/m:8 /l:h /v

SET MOUSE=C:\LMOUSE
c:\qemm\loadhi /rf
C:\LMOUSE\mouse.exe
goto END

:NOMEM
c:\win95\command\mscdex.exe
/d:mscd001 /m:8 /l:h /v

set mouse=c:\lmouse
c:\lmouse\mouse.exe

:END
```

The first part sets up the sound card (an AWE-32) and calls a batch file, MATROX.BAT, which sets up the refresh rate for the Matrox Millennium graphics card. The rest of the file is pretty much what you'd expect, but look at the single entry under :WIN95. It's the *win* command. If you boot to the Win 95 DOS prompt (as I specified in the MSDOS.SYS file), you can still run the Win 95 desktop by typing *win*, just like prior versions of DOS. This is how I still manage to boot to the DOS prompt for my games, but run the Win 95 desktop by default.

There's one more important file that resides in the default Win95 directory called DOSSTART.BAT. This is a critical file for running an MS-DOS exclusive game. The DOSSTART.BAT file contains commands that normally run in the AUTOEXEC.BAT file, but *are only required for MS-DOS mode*.

Typically, they would include the MSCDEX.EXE driver for CD-ROM access and the DOS mouse driver. The problem with running MSCDEX.EXE from this file is that it assumes that the CD-ROM device driver ASPICD.SYS in my case) has been executed in the CONFIG.SYS file. Also, Win 95 sometimes REMs the command lines for the CD-ROM controller drivers when it installs. Thankfully, there's a simple solution: Look in your CONFIG.SYS file and make sure that your CD-ROM controller drivers are loading. If you're booting Win 95, it will ignore these DOS drivers and use its own. If you're booting into exclusive DOS mode, these drivers will be there for MSCDEX to call.

That's it in a nutshell. With this setup, I do have to reboot occasionally, but I've *never* had to use a boot disk. Although I've experimented with numerous setups, I always come back to this one.

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Circle Reader Service #52

Client vs. Host Processing

Design Issues To Prevent Cheating In An Online Game

by Alan Lenton

We're now into the third month of development on our online game, EXPLORER, and so far we haven't programmed any of the actual play mechanics. Instead, our programmer is working on the software tools we need to set up the game's databases. These tools give us a kind of "designer's workbench" which is essential to set up the game. Eventually they will be available to higher level players to add their own quests.

So when are we going to start programming the game? Who are you, the producer? (Don't answer that.) It's a good question, but the truth is that if we start programming too soon, we'll waste a lot of time reprogramming large chunks of the game, because the design isn't complete.

> **"The key question is, 'How much intelligence do we put into the player's software?'"**

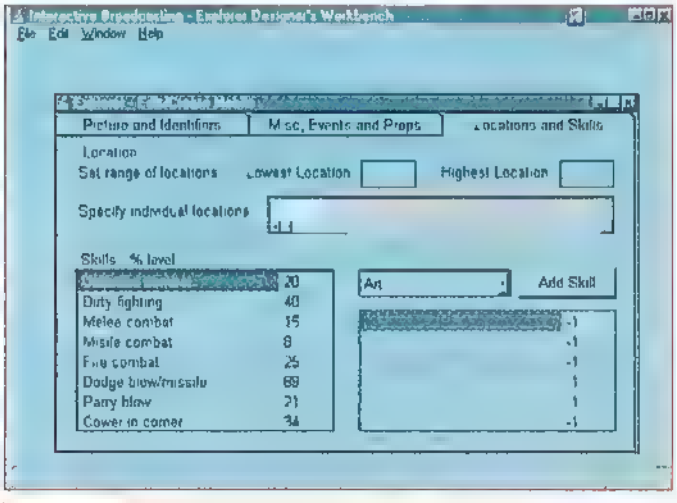
Meanwhile, I have been doing some design work on the terminal program (sometimes called front-end or client software). The key question is, "How much intelligence do we put into the player's software?" A thorny question. The temptation is to off-load most of the work onto the client front-end, generating less network traffic and distributing the processing. This would give us more flexibility with sophisticated game mechanics.

The downside of this approach is twofold. One, network delays play havoc with synchronizing players' client software—leading to more network packet resyncs and causing moving objects to "warp" (move position and present false visual reports). Two, sooner or later someone will hack the client software and publish a cheat version. No matter how well we protect this code, someone will eventually hack it.

There are ways around this problem. For example, we can check key parameters. If this was a naval simulation, we might determine whether the ship is turning through a right angle in one yard as opposed to accomplishing the same maneuver in one mile. Perhaps the host can act as referee so that if two front-ends disagree, the host will decide which position is correct.

We could also keep statistics. It's easy to spot the statistical changes hackers tend to make. Rarely do they change the stats for a 9mm rifle to a 10mm rifle; more likely they'll change it to an 88mm anti-tank gun! These kinds of results are going to stand out like a sore thumb in a supposedly normal distribution curve.

The point is, though, that they all involve extra work in the host. This raises the question whether it's necessary for the client software to do this work if it must be duplicated in the host. The alternative, which we've adopted for EXPLORER, is to make the terminal just an intelligent display unit. The processing takes place in the host and the results are passed to the terminal for display. In this way, the processing power available in the player's computer will be used only to provide a display that can be customized to the player's requirements. This design trade-off imposes some constraints, since there will be additional network traffic and some problems with packet re-synchronization. But since know about them at an early stage, the game can be designed so that these limitations do not affect it.



VIEW TO A SKILL Additional skill parameters mean more CPU work all around, and more network traffic.

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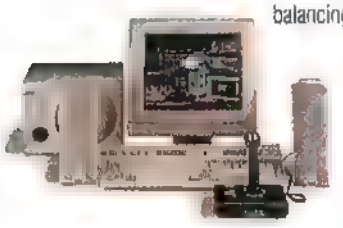

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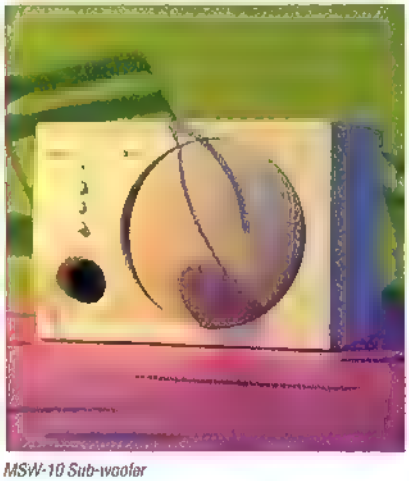

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The Gamesters' Ball

The Computer Game Developer's Conference: High-Brow Content And Low-Brow Schmoozing

by Paul Schuytema

As I sit here in the airport musing on my time spent at the 10th annual Computer Game Developer's Conference (CGDC), I can't help from thinking how lucky you, as game players, really are.

Sure, the conference was over-crowded and full of too much schmoozing to really create a blistering signal-to-noise ratio, but it showed one clear indication about the people who make the games you play: they love to do it and they take their art and craft very, very seriously. Game developers spend incredible amounts of energy on the problems of design, interactivity, graphics, sound, everything. Not one person I talked with at the conference was anything but a dedicated (almost maniacal) game creator.

HIGH CONTENT

The point of the conference, more than anything else, was communication. It was a time for developers (that's everybody who helps create games, from artists to musicians, programmers to writers) to come together and share the experience. Conference session subjects ranged from the value of violence in computer games to creating "modern AI" genetic and neural network algorithms.

Sitting in one session after another, I couldn't escape the sense of dedication and commitment. The attendees seemed to care deeply about the quality of the game experience. AI programmers wrestle with the most effective methods to craft cunning wargame or NPC intelligence. Graphics programmers struggle with incredibly complex techniques to eke the most realism out of our machines. For "code hacks," the talk is of algorithms and "CPU budgets" (the percentage of CPU processing power used for AI and painting images on the screen).

HAVE 3-D, WILL TRAVEL Technology was displayed in three dimensions at the CGDC expo—almost every booth focused on some type of 3-D tool, from modeling packages to accelerator chips.

The vast majority of a CGDC day was filled with learning sessions. Some were non-technical in nature, while others were nuts-and-bolts examinations of a specific topic. Round tables (often the first to fill up) allowed participants to exchange ideas, from wargame design to the problems with WINDOWS 95. It is interesting to note that the "WINDOWS 95 Debate" roundtable was far less of a debate than I expected. Almost universally, all attendees had already acquiesced to the reality of WIN95 becoming tomorrow's game platform.

> "Most of the action went on behind the scenes in a near-orgy level of professional shmoozing."

HAVE YOUR PEOPLE CALL MY PEOPLE...

Most of the action at the CGDC went on "behind the scenes" in a near orgy-level of professional schmoozing. Companies held suites in the hotel for impromptu interviews, book publishers stalked the bars, looking for the next great title for a strategy guide. On Sunday night, many of the companies that held suites opened up their doors for a "suite crawl." For hours, the glassy-eyed developers could schmooze and slurp over great games and imported beer.

PAUL SCHUYTEMA

The schmoozing, while frowned upon by some in the industry as some sort of incestual fertility dance, served the purpose that the CGDC itself once served. It was the time for everyone to interact and toss around ideas—it didn't matter who you worked for or how long you'd been in the industry—veterans and newbies alike gathered to unwind and share tales and anecdotes and yes, even trade secrets.

PROGRAMMER FOR HIRE, ANYBODY?

While community and dedication to computer games was the cornerstone of this year's CGDC, another facet was equally important: the job search. CGDC is *the* place for an up-and-coming game developer to find the first job, or for a hot-shot programmer to land in the company with the largest coffers. In the long line to get into the opening reception, a gangly man stood, like a ticket scalper at a Grateful Dead show, with a hastily scrawled sign in blue magic marker: "wanted, hot programmer, $100K/year."

A job fair was the first stop for those with resume in hand. Dozens of companies, from Accolade to Virgin Interactive, all hung out their shingles and free pens and gawked at the parade of wannabe programmers, artists and producers. While the job fair was the most visible of meat markets, most of the action fell between the cracks, with wandering head hunters, company execs and hundreds of "job opening" fliers plastered everywhere. I spent not more than 15 seconds perusing the job bulletin board before I was accosted by two head-hunting search agencies, each desiring to help me find my niche. When I turned to show them my CGW badge, they faltered for a moment, but continued their pitches.

TECHNOLOGY OF TOMORROW

In addition to the job fair, a small "expo-like" show was set up for the developers to peruse the latest development technology. The lion's share of the booths were dedicated to "things 3-D." Many booths displayed their 3-D development wares, such as MARTIN HATCH's spline-based 3-D modeling and animation program. Autodesk, makers of the ubiquitous 3D STUDIO showed off 3D MAX, their Windows NT upgrade of the defacto 3-D game standard.

On the other side of the development process, many hardware companies like Creative Labs, Intel and others, displayed the latest in 3-D acceleration technology. None of the chips that I saw were polished to perfection, but the time is soon when 3-D accelerators will be as essential as Sound Blaster compatible cards. (*Watch for our first major feature on 3-D graphic accelerators in next month's issue.—Ed.*)

While some developers haven't yet jumped on the 3-D bandwagon, many are closely watching the field, trying to predict which, if any, will leap to the fore and become the de facto standard.

Apple Computer was also there in force, heralding the launch of "Game Sprockets," its new game technology SDK (software development kit), featuring 3-D sound, 3-D acceleration and speech recognition. It remains to be seen if this is too little, too late for the Macintosh gaming community. On an expo floor crowded with people, the large Apple booth was often barren.

ABRASH TALKS QUAKE

Perhaps the most crowded session was Michael Abrash's technical talk on how the QUAKE graphics engine works. Abrash, along with id legend John Carmack, have worked over the past year creating the most visibly stunning 3-D environment on the PC.

Abrash described the many dead-ends he and Carmack encountered as they cobbled together the techniques that allow QUAKE to be both beautiful and fast. He said that they wanted the QUAKE engine to achieve the same level of a technological leap as DOOM was over WOLFENSTEIN 3D. To do that, they had to struggle with the most abstract image processing problems, finally arriving at a hybrid engine which does the job.

In the most fitting reflection of the spirit of the conference, Abrash ended his talk with the simple idea: "We're just trying to make the world a little better. How much better would you have been if John and I patented these ideas instead of me coming up here and telling you how we did it?" The crowd responded with a long thunder of applause.

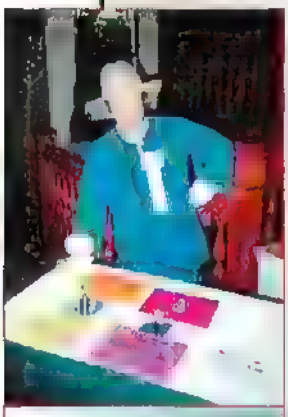
Crawford Conference

Chris Crawford, the founder of the Computer Game Developer's Conference, has a problem with its huge growth and success. When the CGDC first came into being, it was held in Crawford's living room—an informal jam session of ideas and predictions. Over the past few years, the CGDC has become a large and successful conference, drawing in developers from all aspects of the game industry. For him, the deep level of interaction has become too diluted by the masses of attendees. This year, he decided to do something about it, so he created his own one-day conference. "The predicating assumption behind this conference," said Crawford in the program, "is my belief the conventional computer games and video games have reached a creative dead end, yet there remains so much potential to interactive entertainment."

Hand-picking the 43 attendees, Crawford foot the bill for everything, asking only a few things from the attendees. Each of us attending had to submit a workshop idea. Crawford then picked 24 ideas for the one-hour workshops. You didn't know if you were running a workshop until you actually arrived.

The day's topic was the "future of interactive entertainment" and the lively discussions ranged all over the spectrum. One workshop wrestled with the weighty subject of trying to quantify the moment of epiphany so often found in other art and so rarely found in computer games. Crawford explored the continuum between depiction (showing something on the screen as realistically as possible) and representation (providing visual information through more abstract graphics, such as in comic books). This workshop was the most heated of the day, often erupting into declarations of wildly opposing viewpoints. Essentially, the group fell into two schools: those who preferred snazzier, more realistic graphics with less interaction and those who were willing to have less "superrealism" in the graphics but much more interaction.

I suspect that the "high content" of the Crawford Conference was a little loftier than those early days in Crawford's living room—not because we have all grown smarter, but because we have all logged many years in the game industry, and we now have the wisdom of hindsight. Also, it certainly helps that technological limitations are falling away like dead skin, allowing for more pragmatic musings and explorations.



SELF-ADMITTED HAIRSHIRT
Chris Crawford says that the computer games industry is creatively dead. His day-long conference preceding CGDC explored the future of interactive entertainment (*not* games).

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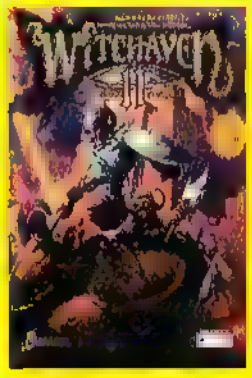

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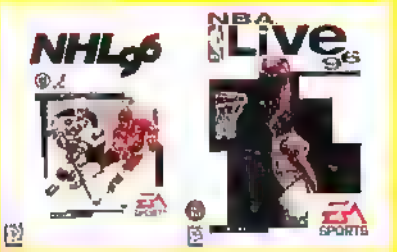

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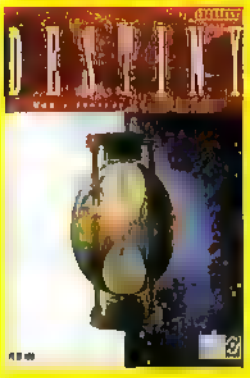

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Cutting Edge

The Ripper Slices Into The 21st Century

RIPPER is a post-modern detective story, set in the year 2040, where a mysterious killer is cutting a bloody swath through the population of New York City. Three victims have been claimed by the beginning of the adventure, with more to come. As Jake Quinlan, ace reporter for a great metropolitan tabloid, you follow up the clues, uncover the evidence, and face the Ripper in cyberspace for the final showdown. This is not quite so easy as it sounds. While the suspects are identified early on, the evidence against them is so finely balanced that it won't be until Act III that you can determine the guilty person. Even then, you have to consider everything carefully to make the right choice at the final moment.

The game's format is a combination of 3-D view and movies. The 3-D is used for walking around within different locations—the newsroom, hospital, police station, etc.—while the movies represent the conversations Jake has with various people, using live actors.

During the conversations, a still shot is onscreen, with a list of topics at the bottom. Clicking on one starts the movie rolling. Depending on the situation, the conversation may be an extended one, with Jake asking additional questions on his own. If someone has no information at the time, he or she simply makes a non-committal remark when you try to talk to them.

POLICE LINE—DO NOT CROSS Christopher Walken is excellent as the sleazy, profane Detective Magnotta. As you elicit information from him, don't push this cop too far—he has a mean streak.

Actions generally are performed with a mouse-controlled cursor in the form of a knife. The blade twirling in place means there are no actions to be taken in that spot. A pointing blade indicates a direction to move, while the magnifying glass is used to see a close-up of some item. The skull is the conversation starter, and the small hand comes up when an item can be manipulated in some fashion.

On some occasions, a small icon appears, indicating an object that may be scanned by Quinlan's tiny portable computer—the WAC. While there are some physical objects to be picked up and carried, many items are documentary, and copied into the WAC database. Most of them are permanent through the game, and can be reviewed at any time. The WAC also houses Quinlan's personal diary, which you may use to enter notes on what you've learned. In addition, certain information will be placed in the diary for you automatically when you

> "For all its flaws, Take 2's RIPPER is one of the better adventures I've played in a while."

CRYSTAL BALL

Star Fleet Academy from Interplay will feature equipment representative of starships between the fifth and sixth *Trek* films. It will also feature new ship designs by Jim Martin, creator of Deep Space Nine's Cardassian look. The story is being done by veteran paper RPG designers Dan Greenberg, Scott Bennie (STAR TREK 25TH ANNIVERSARY) and Steve Perrin (*Runequest*). The adventure will feature over 25 space missions, with ship animation at over 30 frames/second under Win 95. Our mole in the Federation High Council passed on that Patrick Stewart, William Shatner, and Malcolm MacDowell are in the process of doing voice-overs for Spectrum HoloByte's upcoming STAR TREK: GENERATIONS, that evidently will follow closely in the galactic footsteps of the film on which the game is based. Interplay continues to mine rich role-playing veins with their upcoming GURPS: POST NUCLEAR game, based on the popular paper RPG from Steve Jackson Games. The design will be turn-based, with a third-person isometric view of the various characters.

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learn it, mainly passwords into "cyberspace" locations.

In this era, most people have personal work areas in cyberspace called Wells. Being private, they tend to have passwords on them, and ICE to keep out the unauthorized who get by the passwords.

WEB RUNNER WELL If you lack the proper password, the defending ICE can be intimidating.

ICE comes in two flavors, hostile and puzzling. Hostile ICE has to be destroyed in combat. You control a set of crosshairs, shooting with the left mouse button and protecting yourself (raising a shield) with the right mouse button. A set of indicators on the right side of the screen keeps track of your damage, the ICE's damage, shield power, and "weapon" power. Fortunately, since this is all virtual, you don't die if you lose, you just get kicked out of the Well. Then, of course, you have to go back in and try again.

Puzzling ICE is just that: a puzzle you have to solve to get into the Well. It can take any form, from a sliding block puzzle to translating hieroglyphics. In this case, there is no penalty for a wrong answer; you can keep working on a puzzle until you have the solution, or decide to leave and return to it later.

Cyberspace itself is circular, and movement is mostly automatic. Upon "decking in" you can choose to go left or right. After that, you just keep moving along, bypassing Wells for which you don't have the password. Moving between locations in the real world is fast and simple. You bring up the world map, which displays all the places you can travel to at that time, and click on the place you want to visit. Some areas, such as the newsroom and the hospital, are always available. Others open only after you've learned about them, either from reading about them somewhere, or from conversations with people in the game.

RIPPER allows for a good deal of customization, both for combat and puzzle difficulty. In addition, you can change the video settings, including tint and brightness, size of screen, etc., thereby giving you a display that looks best on your particular system. Separate controls for sound let you adjust the volume of music and voice to your satisfaction.

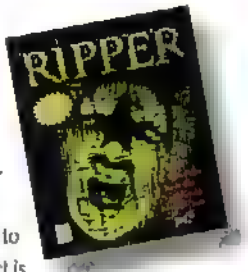
WHODUNIT?

Much of RIPPER's interest comes not only from tracking down the criminal, but by watching the story unfold and the interplay among three of the main suspects. The murders aren't random: there are connections between the victims, and between the victims and the suspects.

Christopher Walken, in the role of Detective Magnotta, steals the show. He is the very archetype of the brutal, dirty cop, who has no qualms about beating suspects, or suppressing, destroying, or forging evidence to get a conviction. His very aspect is menacing, and his appearance in a scene immediately moves the tension up several notches, even before anything happens.

Creditable performances are also given by Karen Allen as the noted Cybersurgeon, Clare Burton (what secrets is that cool, professional exterior hiding?) and David Patrick Kelly, as Joey Falconetti, ace decker and obsessed with the original Jack the Ripper. Joey even has an extensive knife collection.

Take 2 has managed an interesting synthesis of both game and movie genres that actually works well. Once you get started, you find yourself wanting to get on with it to



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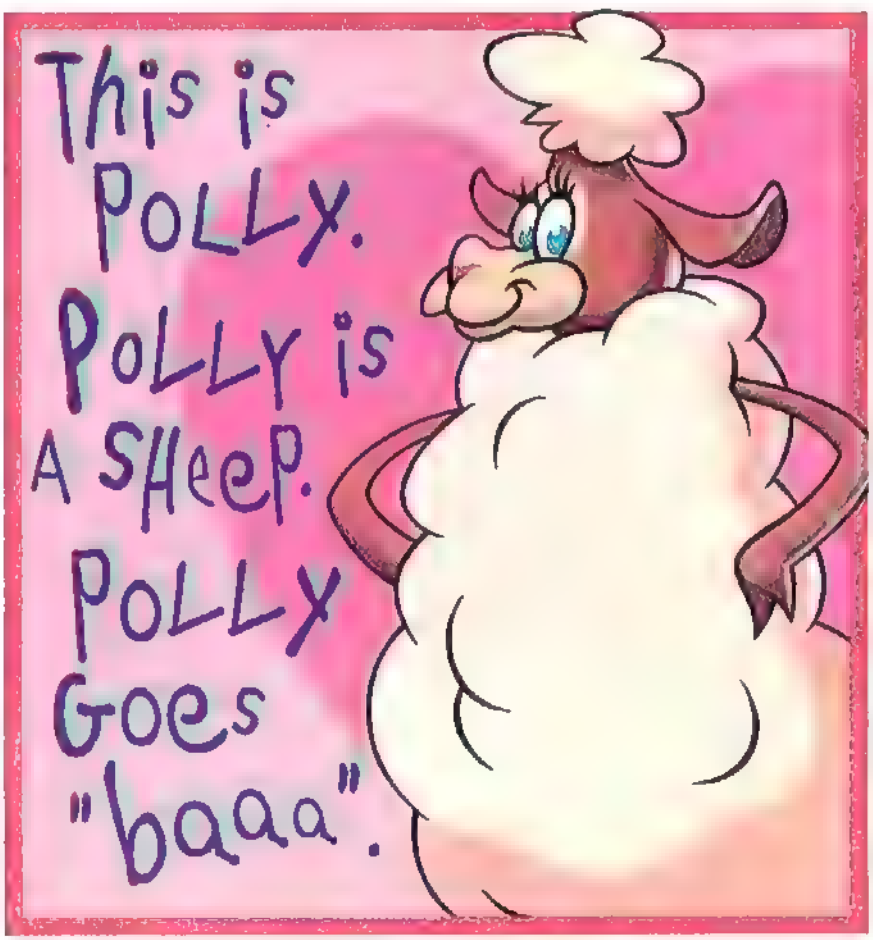

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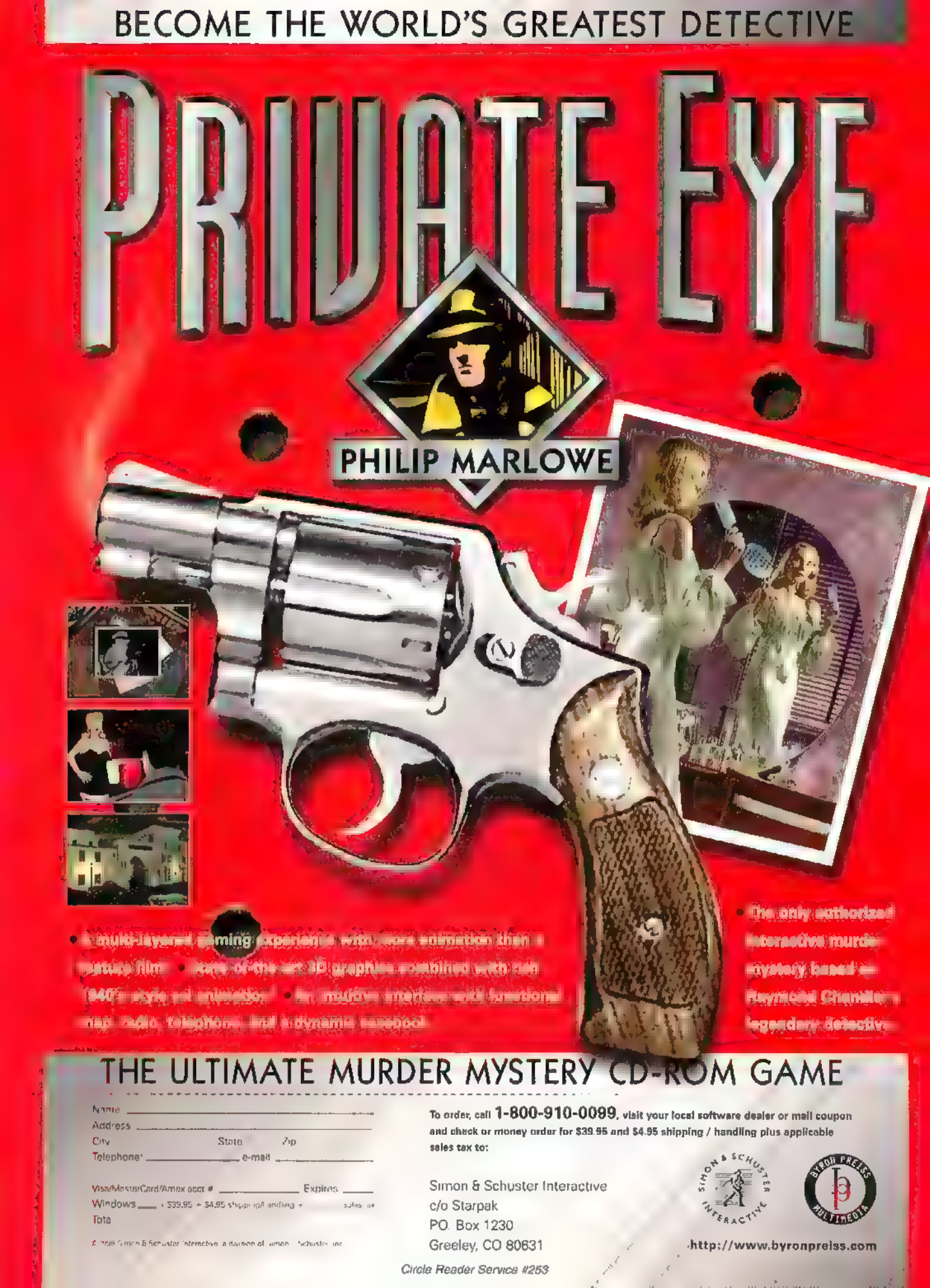
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watch the story play out. Just when you think it has to be the nearly-psychotic Magnotta, you come across something that makes you wonder if maybe it's Burton after all. But then what about Joey and his Ripper obsession?

NICKS IN THE BLADE

Of course, no game is perfect, and RIPPER has its share of faults. At the start of play, one person is chosen for the Ripper. When that game concludes, the software is supposed to remember who it was, and pick another person if you start a new game from scratch. Sometimes, it doesn't remember this, and you won't know until you get to Act III, and play through all or most of it.

Essentially, if everything is looking and sounding exactly the same as the first time through, very likely the bug has struck. Happily, Take 2 has a patch for this problem. You can find it online, or call Take 2 and ask for it.

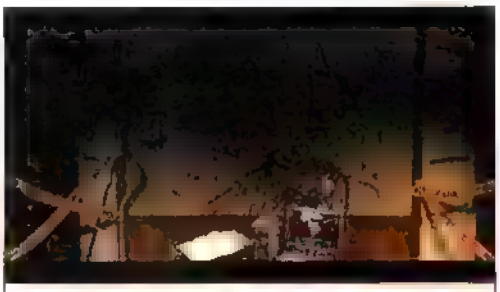
While you can try for all the Rippers, the game's replayability is actually not that great. Acts I&II are always exactly the same in all the scenarios. You have the same conversations, solve the same puzzles, visit the same locations. Even Act III isn't all that different, the changes per Ripper, while significant, tend to be minimal. It's best to put this one aside after finishing, and return to it sometime later, if you want a new culprit.

The puzzles vary from the obscure to the obvious. The password (obtained in Act II) to decrypt Catherine's journal, for instance, is buried in a very unlikely spot, which has, at best, only a minimal connection to her (asking her is not an option; she's an almost-victim and spends the game in a coma). I mention this one because reading the journal is the only way to open up certain things in Act II. You can easily become frustrated there when nothing new is happening or available. In this case, the password should have had a more visible relation to her.

Mystery fans may not be happy with the motivation for the Ripper. In only one case is there really a sufficient motive; in the other three, it's rather glossed over. The emphasis is definitely on the "who" rather than the "why," and some loose ends do not get wrapped up at the finish.

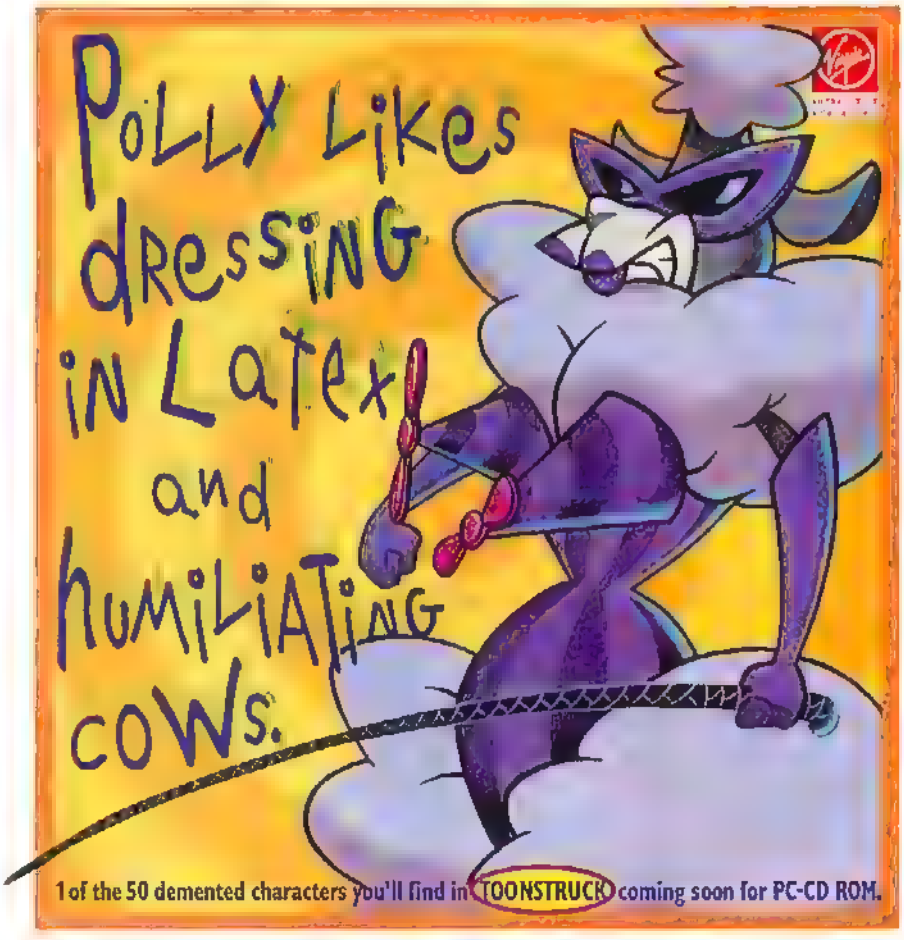
Strangely, the game world seemed amazingly empty. Walk into any real hospital, any police station, any newsroom, and you'll see people, regardless of the time of day, especially in New York. Not here, though. Aside from the story characters, there's just no one around. This emptiness did nothing for a sense of reality, or being in a big city.

The worst part, though, is the interior movement system, which is cumbersome and tedious. You can never go anywhere directly; you always have to make intermediate steps. Just getting across the hospital lab to the ICU unit requires six moves (not to mention all the others just to get to the lab). That's far too much. It would have been better had they handled this from the world map, which shows what rooms are available in each location. You should have been able to click on the individual room and go right there, instead of being forced to take the scenic route" all the time.



SPATTERED EVIDENCE Fortunately, despite the subject matter, there's little gore in the game, other than the two murder sites.

For all that, RIPPER is an interesting game to play, and one of the better adventures I've played in a while. Take 2 has managed to get this to work as an adventure, a movie, and a mystery, which is saying a lot. In spite of the flaws, and if you can stand the strong language (particularly of the "f" and "s" variety), you may well find this one worth playing.



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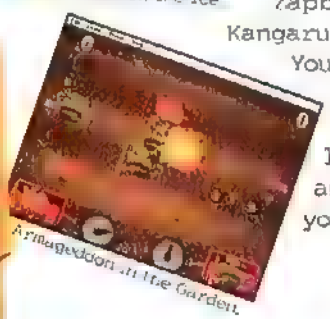

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Scorpia Goes Gold

The Queen Of Crustaceans Comes To The Rescue For The 50th Time

This is something of a momentous occasion—the *50th Mail column* (Eek! It can't be *that* many, can it?). That's a lot of columns and a lot of mail—and a lot of years, but let's not count those (wink). Even after all this time, I still enjoy helping out gamers where I can. I get a kick out of hearing that someone was able to complete a game thanks to a hint I gave. But let's not get maudlin here (I have a reputation to maintain, after all!). Besides, the mail sacks are waiting.

ANVIL OF DAWN: Most of the puzzles aren't too tough, but many adventurers tend to have trouble in the Barrier. Specifically, they're having a hard time getting out the other door. This requires several steps. The first one is getting to the floor plates in the extreme four corners of the level. All of those have to be weighed down. Then there are some switches that have to be pulled, including along the exit corridor. After you've done all that, you'll be able to go on to bigger and better dungeons.

DARK SEED II: One of the tricky situations in this game is determining who is Ik and who is Uk. This is easy to do, once you have all the necessary information. You need to speak to them first to start off. Then you have a little chat with the officer in the jail near the Hall of Justice, and follow that up with a conversation with the guard outside the house. That will give you everything you need to know to tell the twins apart correctly.

DISCWORLD: Rincewind's adventure continues to give gamers fits (well, it *is* one of the harder games around these days). One section causing premature gray is getting the broomstick back from Wuidlepoons in Act III. For this, you need something slinky, something stiffening, and a fertile imagination. Put them all together, and you'll be able to make the switch.

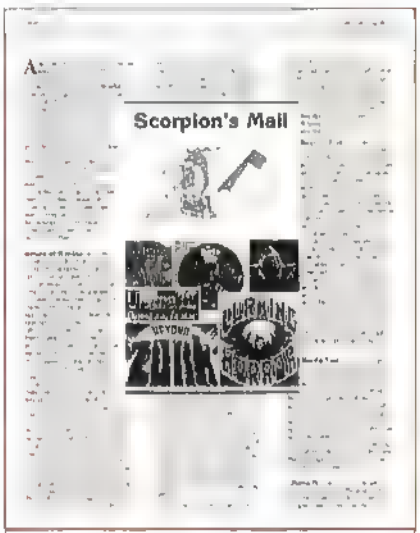
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER II: After a long hiatus, this one appears to be popular again (must have something to do with those shovelware multipacks. Heh). There are several tricky instances in the game, and one of them is the place with the sign that reads "You must leave many things behind." Well, "many" doesn't mean "all," and you don't need to put something on every floor plate, just on some of them. Think of it as marking the spot.

GABRIEL KNIGHT 2: The end game in the basement can seem harder than it actually is if you don't realize that Gabe can shut the doors down there. Just trying to chase the werewolf around won't work; he'll get away every time. You must close off access to all the bolt holes before you go after him. Then, you have to work out the one right path to force him into the furnace room.

I HAVE NO MOUTH: Ted's scenario isn't too difficult, except perhaps for discovering the location of the mirror. The devil's hint is a trifle on the obscure side, and he isn't referring to the evil chapel (which would seem the likely spot). In this case, you'll probably want to catch up on your reading; there's some hot stuff to check out.

PRISONER OF ICE: Some folks have found the office safe to be a bit difficult to open up. They have half the combination, but the other part eludes them. That half is not easy to find, and you could use the brute force method (trying all the numbers on the dials) as a last resort. But it's much easier to just get the second set of numbers. You'll want to check out the reading material in Mel Aglen's room very carefully, and very slowly.

Until next time, happy adventuring!



THE ORIGINAL SCORPION'S MAIL Scorpion's first Mail column appeared in the March, 1988 issue of *CGW* (#45). It had hints for BEYOND ZORK, BARD'S TALE I, ULTIMA IV, MIGHT & MAGIC, as well as other games even more obscure. Hints historians can find her first column online at www.zd.com/gaming. The old arachnid's aged rather well, wouldn't you say?

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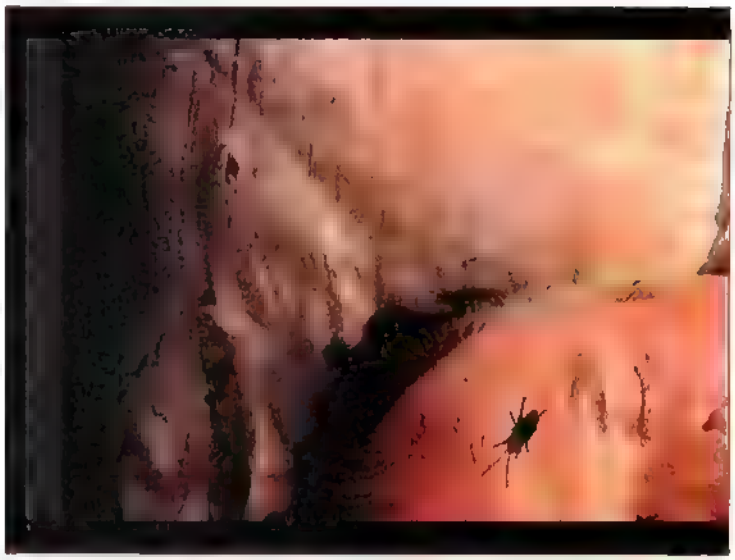
DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY

Twilight of the Cockroach

BAD MOJO Evokes Kafka So Well It'll Turn Your Stomach

by Arinn Dembo



A REAL HEAD SLAPPER It doesn't get much more up close and personal than this–if you can't handle roaches, don't check into BAD MOJO's virtual motel.

I'll never forget the first sentence of *The Metamorphosis*. It's one of the best opening lines in Western lit: "When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin." I don't think there's ever been a less apologetic beginning for a weird story; I've always loved it. Of course I never dreamed that the effect Franz Kafka achieved in *The Metamorphosis*–transforming the human reader into a cockroach–could be successfully translated into any other medium than the printed page. After all, no movie could really convey the same mixture of fascination, dismay, disgust, and vertigo; it isn't easy to capture the bug's-eye perspective. But is it impossible? Luckily, Pulse Entertainment shows that the modern computer game is a superior medium to film, in some respects. Their latest game, BAD MOJO, takes the same premise that Kafka started with, and takes it one step further. What if Gregor Samsa had awakened as a monstrous vermin, and then decided to do something about it?

A fascinating thing about BAD MOJO is the overhead view of yourself as the cockroach scurrying about as you move using the four arrow keys. The animation of the scuttling roach is remarkable. Its movements are extremely life-like, especially when it scuffles and struggles through a barrier, or when its legs are caught in something sticky. You aren't the only bug around, there are plenty of other animated roaches scuttling around the screen to keep you company. They don't interact with you, but provide an excellent atmosphere. Passing their broken bodies scattered all over the building gives a real sense of foreboding as you navigate through pest strips and roach motels.

The main strength of this game is the environment. The visuals are by far the game's most eye-catching feature; landscapes of spine-tingling horror and startling beauty pop up often. Unlike Gregor Samsa, the player is not really a "monstrous vermin", you're just a good-sized roach. Accordingly, the world around you is huge and filled with wonderfully unpleasant things, which you see in technicolor and in frightening detail. You may crawl over the ghastly carcass of a rat broken in a trap, or traipse over a sleeping man's face. The lookout from the top of a

PORCELAIN DREAMS Crossing the sink brings you closer to eventual transformation, but don't slip on the soap, or you'll be "out on the tiles" in more ways than one.

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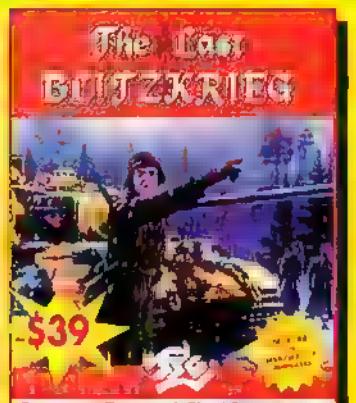

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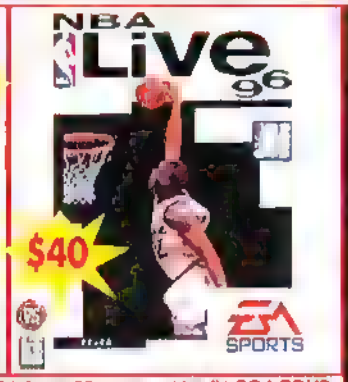

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urinal is like a scenic view into the Grand Canyon. It really is amazing.

KAFKA THIS

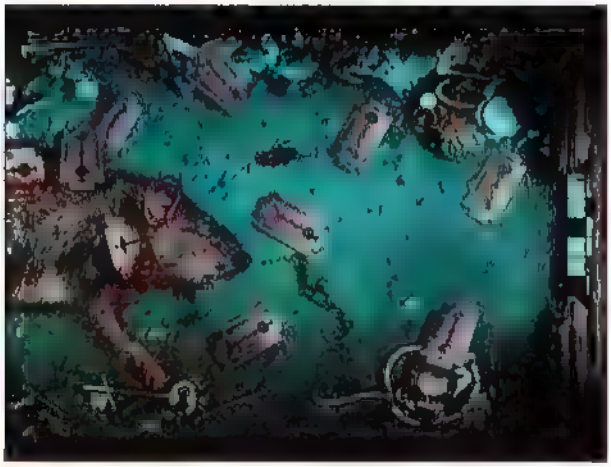
BAD MOJO centers around exploration and discovery, rather than action. There are puzzles, of course, but most of them aren't lethal. Some puzzles test your survival skills like navigating around a roach motel or killing a spider. Other puzzles are harder problems; how do you get from the paper towel dispenser to the floor, when wet paint covers the walls? The rest just advance the plot and move you through your quest of finding a way to change yourself back into a human being. Since you have no hands, you can't manipulate objects in the usual way, but as a cockroach equipped with human intelligence, you aren't exactly helpless. It's amazing how many puzzles can be solved by pushing objects with your head.

But there's more to this game than great graphics and puzzles. It's also a story about discovery and enlightenment. As our hero scurries from room to room, he quite practically gets a new perspective of himself, of his environment and of the miserable old landlord that he has always found so easy to hate.

When you crawl into an old rattan suitcase under the landlord's bed, you find poignant evidence of the man he must once have been. A photograph of the battleship he served aboard in World War II, a Purple Heart, a picture of three smiling young sailors with their arms around each other's shoulders lay inside. On top of it all is a death certificate, dated 1958, for his wife who died in childbirth. The lonely cot he sleeps in, the uneaten TV-dinner, the picture of a dark-eyed bride which hangs on the painted cinder block wall are all images that speak volumes about this man's loneliness and despair.

SO MUCH MATTRESS STUFFING All that green aval is you little in your present state–a good example of how the game works on more than one level, without cramming morals down your thorax.

I thought that this was a beautiful moment and a truly inspired direction to take the premise of *The Metamorphosis*. Crawling through the filth and dark, our hero is gaining insight by being led from one vista of human feeling to another. His guide in this journey is a female entity who speaks to him through fellow roaches, rats, slugs, silverfish and other pests. She also appears when you touch her symbol, a kind of flaming eye sometimes found pressed into the concrete, stamped on a coin, or traced in condensation on a window pane. The cryptic visions and clues in verse she gives are important hints for the game and the identity of the spirit guide, (Is she the ghost of Angelina Battito? Our hero's mother?) is one of the more interesting questions of the game.



THE RAZOR'S EDGE If it looks like a trap, smells like a trap well, use your head and assume that nothing is dead–or you might be.

GOT MY MOJO WORKIN'

All in all, BAD MOJO is just the thing for gamers who truly hunger for something unique and totally off the beaten track. If anyone does crave a comparison, oddly enough, I'd say that BAD MOJO resembles MYST. Despite the difference in sensibilities, both games involve puzzles and exploration against stunning visual backdrops. In fact, the backdrops, or more specifically, the sheer number of them represent the only gameplay snag that sometimes distracted me. Since you are a roach traveling in human-sized rooms, there are a lot of screens where there is nothing to do except cross them. Luckily, most of these backdrops are interesting enough to keep tedium from setting in too quickly.

BAD MOJO also gets a nod for its excellent technical performance and top-notch presentation. The game ran from Windows 95 on my 486x66 without a hitch and its music and sound were unusually good. I had no problem with slow-downs, crashes, lock-ups or any of the other goofiness that is common in today's multimedia. In short, I recommend it highly, especially for those of us who aren't easily spooked by a little existential nausea.

APPEAL: Much wider than you'd expect: even Franz Kafka might have enjoyed this original and clever game.

PROS: Stunning visuals, interesting theme, good animation and music and cute puzzles.

CONS: The incredible detail of the roach's world is not recommended for those with weaker stomachs. Original as the concept is, really experienced gamers will still probably find the game too easy.

CG RATED ★★★★

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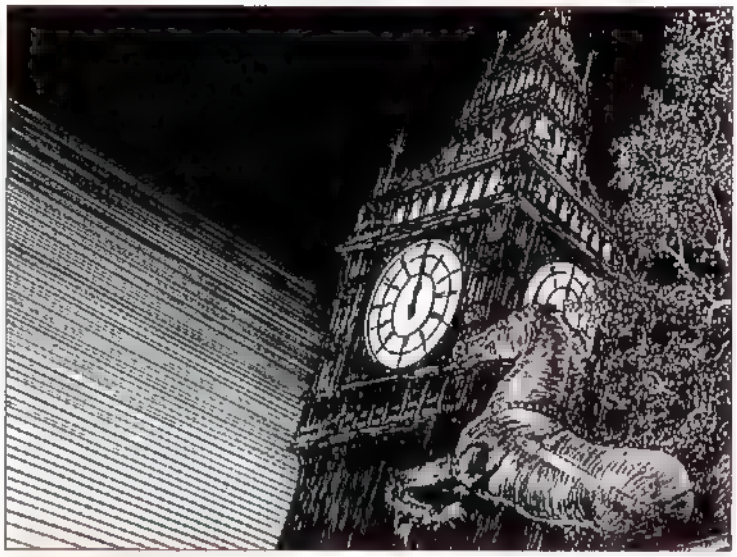
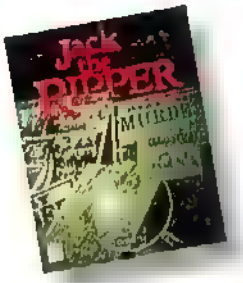
JACK THE RIPPER's Century-Old Tale Still Serves Up A Saucy Mystery

by Arinn Dembo



LIGHT & SHADOW The stark graphic look is eerily appropriate, making you wonder where in foggy Victorian London the Ripper might strike next.



Price: $49.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386-33 or better, 4 MB RAM, 5 MB hard drive space, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, mouse; supports AdLib Sound Blaster, Gravis and Roland sound cards
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Intergalactic Development, Inc
Publisher: Gametek, Inc
North Miami Beach, FL
(305) 935-3995
Reader Service #: 332

Whitechapel, 1888. putting together that name and date still gives us a shiver. This poor suburb of London, in the year 1888, was the epitome of everything that could go wrong in an industrial city and a modern age, if there has ever been a blacker bog's wallow of filth, addiction, prostitution and poverty, I haven't heard of it. The life blood of the city was cheap gin; in alleys full of garbage and running sewage, women sold their bodies for the price of a drink. The streets were lined with vermin-infested dormitories for the poor, work-houses for men and shabby cribs for women still young enough to earn the price of a room. Violence was so common that the cry of "Rape!" or "Murder!" wouldn't lift an eyebrow–the residents of Whitechapel were so wretched, that death no longer concerned them. But in the autumn of 1888, they rediscovered the value of human life. From the morning of August 31st to the night of November 9th, the borough was a hunting ground for the most famous serial murderer of all time: Jack the Ripper.

ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR WATSON

JACK THE RIPPER is an old-fashioned murder mystery, in which you are cast as an unknown amateur investigator, working your way through the Whitechapel and Spitalfields boroughs of London during the Ripper's reign of terror, interviewing suspects, searching locations and gathering information. When a witness is interviewed or an object discovered, a text window appears on the screen. The goal of your interrogations and searches is to collect "premises"–blocks of text containing important facts and hints–from the written description of a person or an object. Once a premise has been discovered, it is entered into a notebook. The key activity of the game is opening this notebook and trying to form two of these premises into a conclusion–a third premise that follows from the first two. Ultimately, you should have enough information to put together two premises, applying pure logic, and come up with the most important conclusion of all–the identity of the Ripper.

Success in the game is measured in points: you receive 85 for every clue found by searching a location, 75 for every premise copied into the notebook, and 225 for each conclusion; with a bonus of several thousand points, depending on difficulty level and how quickly you solve the mystery, for discovering the identity of the Ripper. Time is the most important factor in the game. You have a total of 17 hours to work each day, and your investigation occurs only on the days when the Ripper has struck, giving you a total of 68 hours to uncover the Ripper's identity. If you haven't put two and two together by midnight on November 9th, you will be Jack the Ripper's final victim.

The interface is very friendly and intuitive, as well as amazingly fast to use; it's mouse-driven, with multiple menus and windows of information, including the screen shot of your current location, sketches of suspects, witnesses, and physical evidence, and text windows. You can use the Search Location command, to search the entire area and uncover any evidence in plain sight, or left-click and drag open a box in a superimposed on smaller area of the screen, which can be searched more quickly to expose hidden objects. To interrogate a witness, you select the Interrogate command, then click on the text of the interview, sentence by sentence, to find any premises it may contain. Double-clicking on a premise will enter it into your notebook, at which time it can be given a label to make the information easy to recover. Dragging premises from the notebook to the blackboard will determine whether any two premises lead to a conclusion.

JACK THE RIPPER is a simple, elegant,

You must have total concentration. You must become one with your machine. Because if you don't

You will become one with your machine.

STATE OF PAIN

COLLISION

COMING SUMMER 1996

FROM POWERHOUSE ENTERTAINMENT

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HULLO, WHAT'S THIS? As you enter each crime scene, you are provided with a list of suspects, along with witnesses, newspaper items, police reports, and various clues.

and intelligent game employing investigation techniques reminiscent of Sherlock Holmes—the use of pure reason and deductive logic to solve a crime. The player's inventory contains just the essential facts, and there are no ridiculous quests or contrived puzzles to solve. Gameplay moves fast, any single investigation will usually be resolved within six or seven hours of play, depending on the difficulty level. (Setting the game at Intermediate or Difficult will make your investigator's virtual time pass more quickly.)

There are five solutions to the game, with different evidence planted to incriminate different suspects. The replay value of the game is limited by the number of solutions, but the software yields somewhere between 25 and 40 hours of play if you try to solve every scenario. And, as an added bonus, Intergalactic Development, Inc., the developers of this little gem, will send you a sixth solution on a 3.5" disk for just $5! I found this gesture quite refreshing, in an industry where companies with far more resources are squeezing the consumer for every bloody dime.

WHERE TO, GUV? This close-up of the navigation screen shows some of the famous locations accessible—by hansom cab, of course—as you travel across a pleasant period map of London.

HURRY: PRECISE & STYLISH

Why are we still fascinated by the Ripper? Hard to say. The 20th century has certainly seen higher body counts; only five murders are officially attributed to Saucy Jack, whereas Ted Bundy once laid claim to more than two hundred. Jack's mutilations were spectacular in their precision, in the utter disregard for the humanity of his victims, but in comparison to the butchery and amateur taxidermy of a character like Edward Gein, let's face it—he was a bit of a piker. Of course, the Ripper was never caught...but neither was the Cleveland Torso Murderer, despite the efforts of one of the great lawmen of the twenties, Eliot Ness.

If you analyze the particulars, there is very little in the Whitechapel murders that hasn't been done bigger and better by some more modern monster. If we are still interested in the Ripper, it comes down to something that cannot be measured objectively—that is, style! The Ripper created not just a mess, but a mystery; at bottom, there's always the burning desire to know how it was done. Why was there so little blood on the skin and clothing of Polly Nichols? How did he perform the spectacular double homicide of September 30th, killing two women in two separate neighborhoods in less than two hours? Were the police really baffled as to his identity—or was it all a cover-up? And above all: *who was he?* JACK THE RIPPER may not give you the definitive answers, but it's a gaming journey well worth taking.

STRENGTH IN SIMPLICITY

JACK THE RIPPER is a fine example of a good game with limited resources. There are no embarrassing voice actors or painfully bad dialogue. There are no primitive animation sequences, no terrible live action video clips, and no shiny, empty SVGA sprites which cover an intellectual vacuum. There are no pointless departures into old arcade clones, no mazes, no gambling, no Reversi puzzles.

Instead, the system demands of this game are negligible, and its technical performance is absolutely flawless. While the graphics are low-tech, the black-and-white drawings and grainy old photographs are atmospheric and pleasing. The writing is good, and the research that produced this title was thorough, extensive, and well-directed; 72 human beings and 31 locations in Whitechapel and Spitalfields have been reproduced for this game, using photographs, line drawings, blueprints and sworn statements from 1888. It goes to show you that a design can always afford to be clever—and that simplicity can be a strength rather than a weakness.

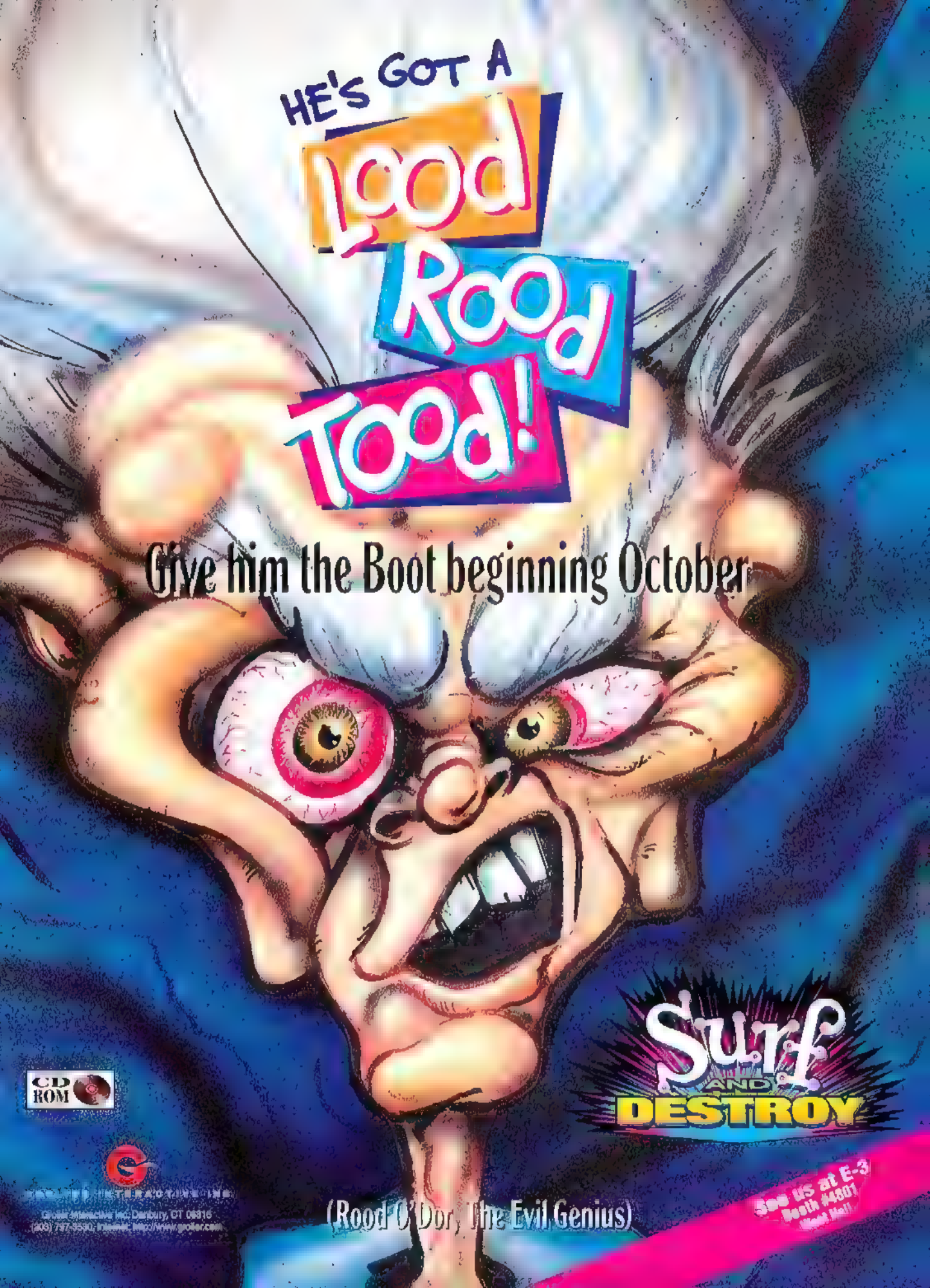
Not to say that there are no weaknesses in the game—there are only a limited number of conclusions that can be drawn from the available premises, and I found it very hard to catch the Ripper if the game went beyond the third day—but all the basics have been nailed down. I was never bored, or so frustrated that I didn't want to keep trying. Even if I had to restart a scenario, I was always eager to continue and win. Essentially, this game is a modern evolution of the old text adventures, low budget but highly entertaining. If you'd like to try a game that tests your wits rather than your reflexes, you should give this one a try.

APPEAL: Anyone who has ever wanted to know the true identity of Jack the Ripper will enjoy hunting him down using Sherlock Holmes-type methods.

PROS: Smart, well-researched and well-written title which provides an immersive simulation of 1888 Whitechapel.

CONS: No explosions, no shooting, no puzzles, no inventory—is this really a computer game? Fans of the latest computer technology may find this dated.

CG RATED ★★★★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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

Adventure Devoid

Mindscape's Attempt At Interactive Film Is Atmospheric, But Little Else

by Mark Clarkson

If you're into visuals for their own sake, you might enjoy Mindscape's ANGEL DEVOID: MASK OF THE ENIAC. This adventure strives for a cyber-future feel *a la* Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, but doesn't quite match up. The 3-D modeling and rendering are easily the best parts of the game environment. Unfortunately, other than the visual style, there's little to like about the game.

You play the part of a hardened cop with the improbable name of Jake Hard. After a critical accident during a high-speed chase, you awaken to find yourself mute, and your face reconstructed, without your consent, to resemble that of notorious and equally improbably named villain, Angel Devoid. Now, a fugitive from justice yourself, you must clomp through a poorly executed story involving Martian explosives, escaped cyberdogs, stolen computer chips and other sundry.

The acting in ANGEL DEVOID ranges from lame to "Please don't make me watch that scene again!" And that's a real problem, because you'll probably have to watch that scene again. And again. ANGEL DEVOID commits the unpardonable sin of not letting you skip dialogue, descriptions, scenery or anything else. By the time you die and restore a dozen times, you'll yearn to fast forward through badly acted monologues that are often blurry, mumbled or otherwise indecipherable above the repetitive background noises.

As in 7TH GUEST, your viewpoint "walks" when you move from place to place. That would be all right, but you can't disable it. You can't fast forward through it. You can't skip it. And, by the time you've walked slowwwly down the same street four times, you certainly wish you could.

'TWAS A DARK AND EMPTY NIGHT ANGEL DEVOID strives for a *cyber-noir* feel, but comes up short in all areas save atmosphere.

DIE, DIE, EVERYBODY DIE

You soon find out that Angel had a special touch with the ladies. After twenty minutes of play, Angel's old lovers had already poisoned me, shot me and blown me up with a hand grenade. Inch for inch, ANGEL DEVOID offers more death traps than DOOM. Take a wrong turn and you die. Stand still too long and you die. Wait to hear what someone has to say and you die. Shoot at stray dogs and you die. Practically the only consequence of wrong decisions is instant, violent death. The only sound policy is to save as often, shoot first and ask questions later.

At least you're not alone. You've got your trusty PDA: a mind-reading computer personality who, in theory, is your available to offer hints and tips to otherwise help you through the game. In practice, the PDA almost never says anything of any use whatsoever, restricting her input to such gems as, "That was close," and "Maybe you should change deodorants."

The video playback seems confined to a handful of colors, mostly gray and red, an artifact that actually adds to the game's gritty look and feel. However, it gave me a headache after a half hour or so of play. Worse, the game flatly refused to run on two of my three machines, and the more I played, the less I liked it. But I didn't play it for long. Despite coming on four CDs, ANGEL DEVOID is surprisingly short game: a weekend's work at most for any experienced gamer.

Price: $63.95
Minimum Requirements: 486-66DX2 or better (Pentium recommended), 8 MB RAM, 1 MB SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM, supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards
Designer: Electronic Dreams Inc.
Publisher: Mindscape
Novato, CA
(800) 234-3088
Reader Service #: 333

APPEAL: If you believe that cyber-future worlds exist solely as different settings for shooting people, go ahead, but we warned you.

PROS: A full-motion, atmospheric environment, with realistic buildings, vehicles and trash.

CONS: Horrible acting, a confused plot, tortuously repetitive background noises, and lots and lots of interface annoyances.

CG RATED ★

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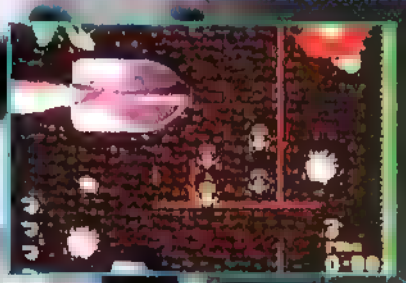

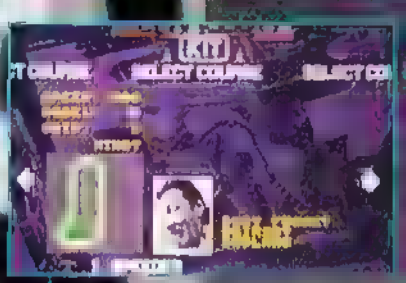

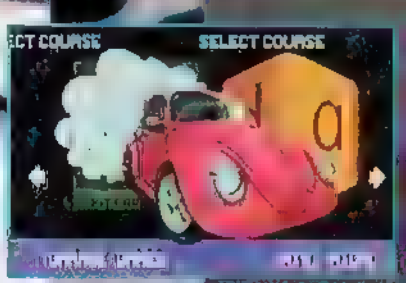

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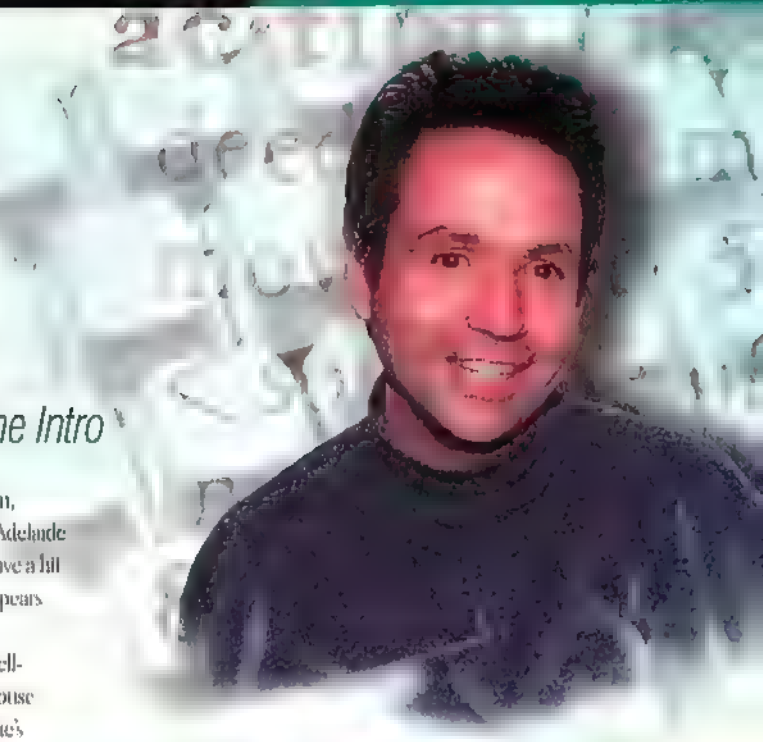
It's About Time

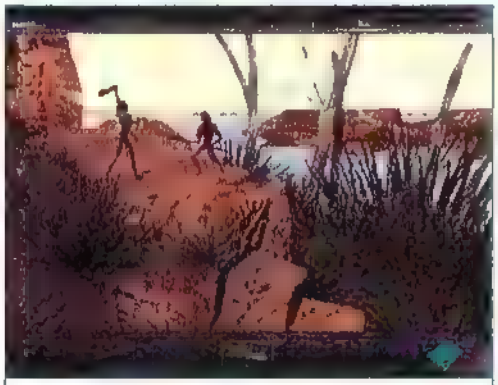
TIME COMMANDO Looks As Good As A Game Intro



Remember the gorgeous introduction animation to MECHWARRIOR 2? Or the lascivious, tunnel-crawling intro to CRUSADER: NO REMORSE? Remember wanting to play those games with the same graphics you found so delicious in their introduction sequences? Well, it never happened. Game intros do not look like the games that follow them. That is pretty much a hard and fast rule. There's the stylish rendered intro, and then there's...well, whatever the game may be, and the two are invariably different animals that don't share a bed. How, then, to explain TIME COMMANDO? It looks like an intro. It plays like a lustrous 3-D platform game-cum-beat-em-up. On the evidence of a pre-alpha version, Activision and French developer Adelande Software (RELENTLESS) should have a hit on their hands when the game appears for Windows 95 and MS-DOS.

And not just a hit. Also a few well-placed kicks, left jabs and roundhouse rights. See, unlike Mr Van Damme's TimeCop, your hapless time traveler—a computer repairman swept into the Earth's past by a virus—doesn't give a hoot about polluting history with his more aggressive instincts. To follow this sumptuously rendered garden path through nine time zones (each with two levels, you'll have to beat senseless most of the indigenous population.

Never mind that, in



BUSHWHACKED The scenery for the Prehistoric level of TIME COMMANDO is breathtaking, and the gameplay is top-notch as well.

> "TIME COMMANDO looks like an intro and plays like a lustrous 3-D platform game."

INSIDE ACTION

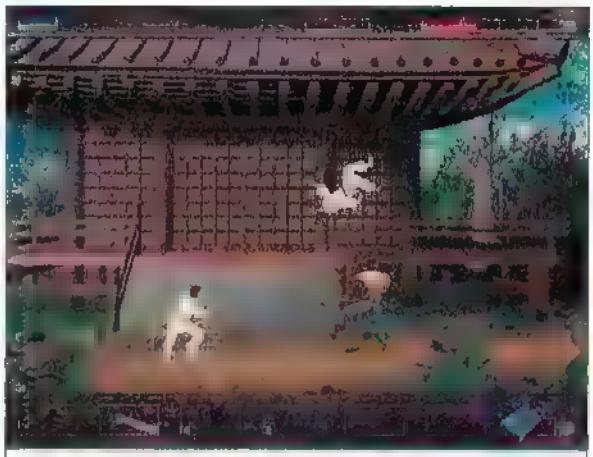
▸ The dust hasn't even settled yet, but Psygnosis is already working on DESTRUCTION DERBY 2. The PC version was a PlayStation port that arrived a few months after the original, but DERBY 2 will release in the fourth quarter on both platforms. It will have an enhanced 3-D engine, better tracks and more features. We'll keep you posted.

▸ During the past few months, Sega PC has brought PANZER DRAGOON and a few other Saturn ports over to the PC, but gamers who wanted to play these games had to pick up a $300+ Diamond Edge 3-D video card to play them. Well, several upcoming Sega titles being converted to the PC will not require special hardware. Look for the original VIRTUA FIGHTER to come in September, with the background graphics gutted so as to not slow down performance, SONIC CD in June and the Saturn platformer, BUG!, in July. Keep an eye out as well for Sega's arcade racing hit, DAYTONA USA and possibly the shooter VIRTUA COP at the end of the year.

VIRTUALLY COMPLETED A non-hardware-specific VIRTUA FIGHTER is in the works for the PC, though some of the graphics won't be as sharp as this 3-D version for the Diamond Edge.

theory, you may be killing your umpteenth great grandmother and that you may resurface in the present to find Bob Dole on "The Guiding Light." You have to get back home, and this path takes you through ancient Rome, medieval Europe, feudal Japan, the Aztec empire, the Old West, 20th century battlefields, the future and, at length, the computer.

The dozen levels I saw looked fantastic—rich cut-scene animation which just happens to be wholly and seamlessly interactive. In the Stone Age, where the game begins, your opponents include gorgeously drawn and animated saber tooth tigers (who seem to fold themselves to the ground when they die), chest-beating apes, club-wielding and stone-throwing Neanderthals—including, optionally, a cute little number in a Betty Rubble outfit who otherwise throws rocks at you and flees the field in evident distress.



FISTS OF FURY The Ancient Japan level has some great weapons, like samurai swords and shurikens, but the graphics are still being tweaked

It's always nice to face opponents who sense their own mortality—it gives TIME COMMANDO a human face—and the critters here do not willingly put their heads on the block. Instead, they may cover their faces with their hands and cower. More than once, in sympathy, I was moved to back off.

Then again, it just doesn't pay to be a nice guy in action games. Enemies may also dodge left and right, retreat at your thrusts, gang up on you or cautiously await your approach and launch a sudden attack. The kamikaze approach to AI obviously hasn't been used here.

Along the way, you'll use the keyboard to steer your character over 50 weapons (stowed in a screen-bottom armory), extra lives and memory chips (which zap off the screen in true platformer fashion) that can be cashed in to forestall the progress of the virus.

I haven't seen any puzzles per se, but some exploration and problem solving has been worked enjoyably into the fabric of the game. You'll find the odd hidden cul-de-sac with the odd pleasant surprise. On a medieval level, you'll need to find the hidden trigger for the castle's inner gate. And you're never going to get past the huge bear that guards the exit from the second prehistoric level without grabbing the equally huge club in the level foyer. The thing is, it's about as heavy as a dump truck—and other enemies will beat the tar out of you while you try to get off one lousy swing. (In other words, sometimes you have to use the right weapon at the right time.)

Gameplay will also be varied and interesting, since all nine levels will require different strategies. Straight-up melee might work in the Prehistoric era, but in the Old West, you'll have to learn to draw your guns quickly and dodge fire from enemy cowboys in a VIRTUA COP/CRUSADER-style shooter.

In the final version, we're told you'll be able to revisit different time periods, but don't even think about taking that laser gun and zapping sabretooth cats in Prehistoric times. For game balance, weapons can't be brought outside their time period.

Some of this may feel familiar. The polished characters are a holdover from RELENTLESS, but they're not petite any more. The range of views from the game camera—long-distance shots to close-ups—gives your character presence. And that same use of camera angles and the detailed and intense fisticuffs are carryovers from ALONE IN THE DARK (which was directed by TIME COMMANDO author Frederick Raynal). But now the camera is moving with your character, and the enemies have a self-preservation instinct.

And the game has a rendered intro of its own. That's nothing new. But the real intro here—the intro that plays like a game—is TIME COMMANDO itself. And what a nice beginning it is.

CG TIPS!

Deathmatch will turn your environment upside down

QUAKE Deathmatch—If you haven't been fragging your co-workers and friends in a friendly bloodbath courtesy of id software's QUAKE Deathmatch, then hop to it. Strap on your armor, load your super nailgun and start wailing on your boss or buddy. Here are some codes to make the Deathmatches a little more interesting. All these codes must be typed from the server. Hit escape and then type away:

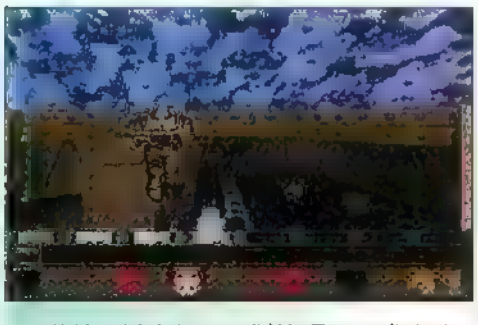
sv_gravity—add any number after this command to set the gravity for the level; a negative value means everyone and everything will float in the air.

sv_friction—add a number here also; low friction means you'll be sliding around as if on ice.

sv_maxspeed—this sets the maximum running speed.

cl_forwardspeed 320—this command can be typed from any machine and will set you to constant running so you no longer have to hold down the shift key to run.

Happy fraggin'.



YOU CAN FLY...but you can't hide. They aren't cheats, but these codes for QUAKE Deathmatch will turn your environment upside down

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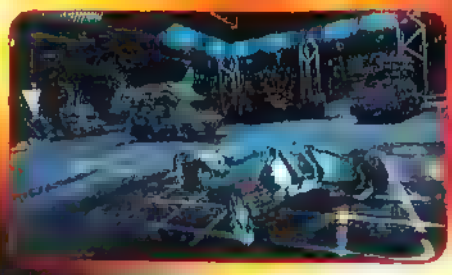

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CYBERIA 2
RESURRECTION

Circle Reader Service #299

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

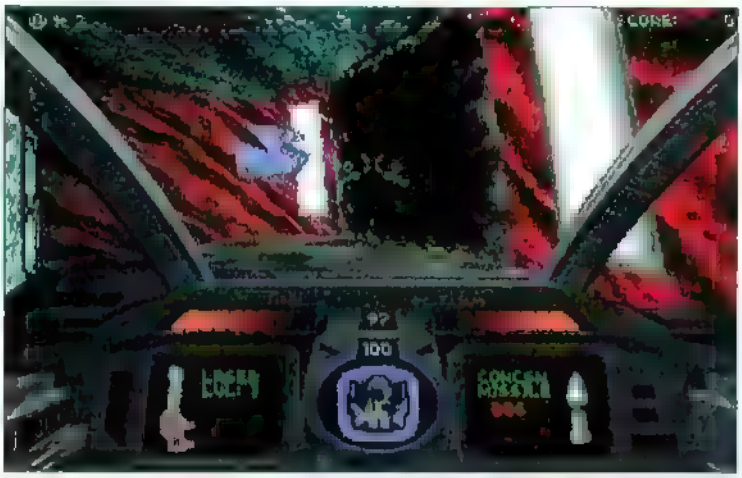
You're Going Down

Interplay Serves Up A Second Helping Of Vertigo Stew

by Paul C. Schuytema

Price: $44.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-50 or better, 8 MB RAM, 2x CD ROM drive, VGA (with SVGA support), 25 MB hard drive space, DOS 5.0 or later, supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards, Forte VFX 1, Virtual I/O glasses, and 3D Max
# of Players: 1-8 (each must have the game)
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Developer: Parallax Software
Publisher: Interplay Irvine, CA (800)-INTERPLAY
Reader Service #:334

Last year, murmurs of Interplay's DESCENT hit the streets even before the shareware version, and nobody seemed too impressed. Already the gaming community had feasted upon a glut of DOOM wannabes, and DESCENT seemed like nothing new. In fact, Parallax had shopped their idea around to Apogee and id before Interplay bit. But once DESCENT hit the net, the 3-D burnouts had been reborn: here was something new and cool. Real 3-D, with six degrees of freedom and levels that looked like some sort of Escherian nightmare rather than a D&D graph paper dungeon.



SHAFTED You're back in the mines and blasting robots because your employers exercised a little contract clause to get you to wipe out the last alien stronghold.

FROM FLIPPERS TO FEET

So this year, gamers have waited in anticipation for the sequel, DESCENT II. It is to DESCENT what DOOM II was to DOOM: an evolutionary step rather than a revolutionary leap. Parallax has tweaked the game in many important areas, but DESCENT's weaknesses still linger.

At it's heart, DESCENT II is a lot of fun. You're zipping through strange and twisty mines, armed to the teeth with cool weapons, blasting robots and gobbling up powerups as you search for the throbbing reactor. The essential goals of DESCENT II are identical to the original: get to the reactor and blow it sky high, then get out. The hostages are still there, but their rescue seems more of an option this time around.

Perhaps the most significant evolutionary upgrade in DESCENT II is the addition of the guide-bot. This little flier is trapped near the beginning of each level. If you blast it free from its cell, it will gladly assist you in navigating through the twists and turns of the mines. The guide-bot is a great idea, since the lion's share of player frustration in the original came from becoming utterly lost in a large level. Because of the limited textures and lack of discernible objects within the mine, visual cues are few and far between, so wandering aimlessly was par for the course in the later DESCENT levels.

The guide-bot is an ingenious workaround. Not only does it help you navigate, but it also adds some excitement and surprises to the play experience. Some might argue that the guide-bot is a crutch, but I disagree. It is only concerned with one thing: finding its goal (you can tell the guide-bot what to seek: the next key, hostages, power center, reactor, whatever). Since it isn't the slightest bit sentient, it will gleefully lead you into a room crawling with robots, causing you to literally jump out of your seat.

The guide-bot makes the play experience much more visceral, since there's no need to worry about the layout of the mine. Another advantage of the guide-bot is that if you see a robot swipe at you and take off, you can high-tail it after the pest for a rousing dog-fight with the knowledge that the bot will come gather you up and get you back on course again. Of course, for you hard-core sadists out there, you don't *need* to free your little friend.

ROBOT BRAINS

Another major problem in the original was the sheer lumbering stupidity of the alien-controlled robots. That's gone now, replaced with a bunch of silicon bad-asses who want nothing more that to lure you into trouble. Running across a solo robot in a corridor no longer means an easy kill. Now, the robot will take a shot and then

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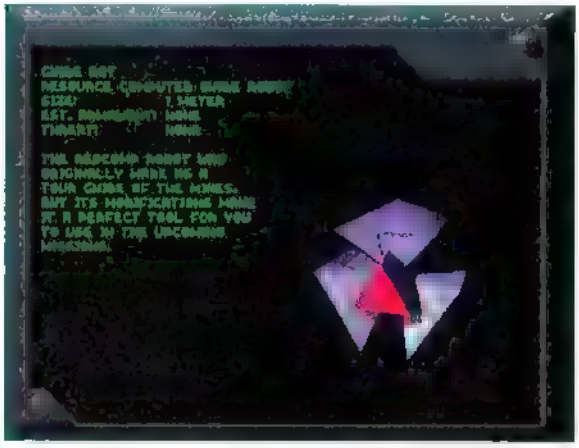
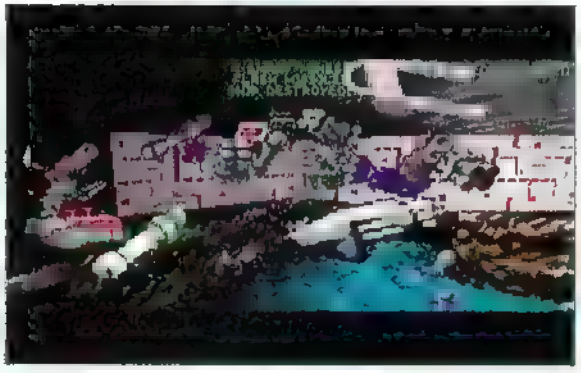


A MERCENARY'S BEST FRIEND DESCENT II's most significant change is the addition of the Guide-bot, who will lead you to the power-ups, reactors and exits.

take off, forcing you into pursuit mode. Robots will hide behind doors, nudging them open just long enough to snipe at you and then make a quick getaway.

In a perfect world, this forces the player to adopt the "belly crawl" tactic, of scraping the floor of the mine, following the "nap of the earth" to avoid any surprises. This doesn't pan out in later levels, though, because the thief-bot will show up when most inconvenient. The thief-bot is a speedy, twitching little annoyance which sneaks up on your six to snag your cool weapons arsenal. Once you turn tail and pursue, you quickly discover what a hard target the little thief is to snipe.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the sound as a significant enhancement to this sequel. Now, while we blast and weave our way through a myriad of mines, we can experience thrashing industrial punk jams, courtesy of redbook audio (the digital audio tracks are streamed right off the CD, not synthesized by you sound card).



GET USED TO THIS SIGHT The major complaint from DESCENT has been fixed: At Now the computer will ambush you, lure you into traps and fight smarter.

ONE IS FINE, BUT ARE MANY DIVINE?

DESCENT and DESCENT II are great single-player games, chocked full of fun and fury. As a two-player game, though, DESCENT II still falls short of the mark. It's not really the fault of Parallax; the "grain" of the game really doesn't support two players very well. Sure, it works just fine over a modem or a serial cable, but most of the fun of the game just falls away. A two-player game, in my mind, is an endless hunt and chase through dizzying mines, followed by an orgy of fire and a coin flip to determine who dies (generally *not* the player who fired first).

This is not the case, though, in a network game. DESCENT II is an excellent network game, especially if you play the new "Capture The Flag" mode. With multiple team players, the world becomes a fascinating and fun playground, and adding the search and retrieve option (you must find the other team's flag and schlep it back to your base to earn 5 points) adds the right amount of direction and focus to make the game a stunning success.

NOT ALL ROSES

While DESCENT II enhances much of the original's play experience, it isn't perfect and even adds some new wrinkles into its interface.

First and foremost, the 3-D engine is rather visually limited. True, it can handle 360 degrees, with corridors popping out of the ceiling, but the worlds themselves are a rather sterile tapestry of grainy textures. Couple that with the grainy textures on the robots, and you have some ocular problems, especially trying to pick out your enemies at medium or long range. Often, the only way to target an enemy is to wait for it to fire on you and then blast back at the source of the projectiles.

Also, the interface is uselessly complex. During gameplay (which is, 90 percent of the time, fast and furious), you often have to tap multiple keyboard sequences to get your guide-bot pointed in the right direction or to divert energy to your shields. This is a problem, since this is a two handed game. Most players will control the forward/back motion on the keyboard and will have to stop their movement (and make themselves a target for a few precious seconds) in order to bang out the code.

Also, like any action game worth its salt, you will die frequently. Yet you have to click and struggle through myriad menus just to get back to your last saved game. You should be able to simply tap a single key to load your last position, rather than wading through the menus and waiting for the game engine to reload the level data.

Finally, my pet peeve of the game: the hostages. They seem inconsequential to the flow of play, and, worse than that, they're the same damn statue spites from the first game. At least make them *look* different if they're nothing more than eye candy.

FURBALL FUN

If you couldn't get enough of the original DESCENT, then DESCENT II is a worthwhile investment. If, though, you feel like you've sucked the marrow out of the original, and aren't really slavering for more, then the evolutionary enhancements probably aren't worth the price. Newbies who want to get their paws on a psycho-fast 3-D shooter won't go wrong with this head-banging dance through an alien mine complex. After all, what's not to like?

APPEAL: Fans of the DOOM school of gameplay.

PROS: Great, visceral, frantic fun that's fully 3-D.

CONS: Only an evolutionary step above the original DESCENT; plagued by grainy textures and an awkward user interface.

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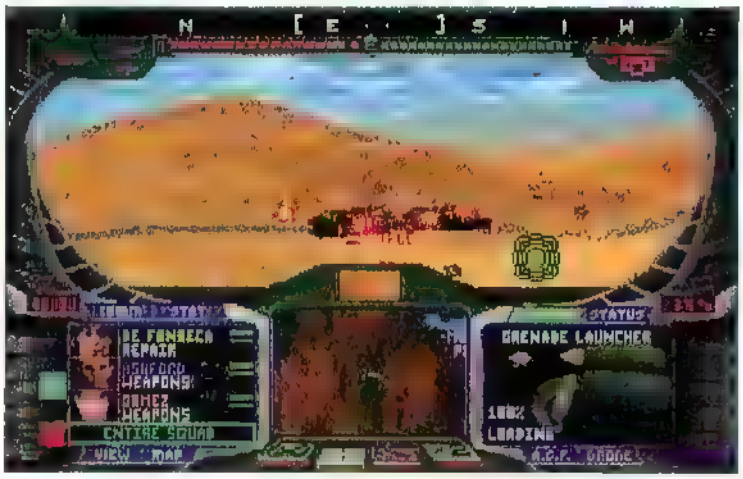
AGES 8+

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

Suit Up And Lock On

Armored Combat Action Invades The Territory Of Mech-style Sims

by Martin E. Cirulis



CONNECT THE FIREDOTS Yes, the explosions are small, but that's because it's best to nail targets at a distance if you are to survive on Alpha Centauri

Some games you lust for long before your monitor lights up in a dance of SVGA electron beams. Other games slowly grow on you, raising your eyebrows ever higher with each new treat hidden in the folds of intricate gameplay. TERRA NOVA: STRIKEFORCE CENTAURI is definitely one of the latter. While I have been a fan of the earlier immersive 3-D worlds by Looking Glass Technologies (the Origin-published ULTIMA UNDERWORLD I & II and SYSTEM SHOCK), the ads for TN were so steeped in testosterone that I was afraid I was going to have to slog through yet another lobotomized, but pretty first-person shooter. I should have trusted them a little more; TERRA NOVA isn't just another action shooter. The more time you spend in this game, the more you realize you're knee-deep in an SF combat simulator that equals, and sometimes exceeds, MECHWARRIOR 2 or WING COMMANDER.

Price: $49.99
System Requirements: IBM compatible Pentium 60 or better, 8 MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM Drive, SVGA graphics, 30 MB hard drive space, mouse, supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards.
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Looking Glass Technologies
Publisher: Virgin Interactive
Irvine, CA
(800) 874-4607
Reader Service #: 335

STRIKEFORCE: DYSFUNCTIONAL

In this complex future, *Homo sapiens* has colonized another star system: Alpha Centauri. It isn't the children of Mother Earth that make this great leap, however, but renegade colonies from the Sol system who struck outwards after gaining independence from the Homeworld. One hundred and fifty years later, there is an uneasy peace between the colonists who are now organized into Clans and the Terran Hegemony. Unfortunately, some of the Clans hate each other as much as the Terrans, and when you add a tradition of pirate raids to the mix you have an explosive situation.

As Nikola Ap Io, the field commander of the newly formed StrikeForce Centauri, your job is to stop these pirate raids with your team of heavily-armed battlesuit warriors. This relatively simple task, though, quickly becomes something far more epic and deadly—not only to you, but to all the Clans, who may lose their liberty permanently.

The plot is revealed by inter-mission scenes, competently acted out amidst needy-rendered backdrops. Initially, the interaction between you and your squad is a little too dysfunctional and insubordinate to make me believe that I'm watching a military outfit. Moreover, the story immediately goes into the oldest of space-sim clichés: "The Blatant Informer on Base." Fortunately, the whole story doesn't hang on this hoary point alone, and TN skims away from the dark edge of tedium to cruise into the land of enjoyable melodrama.

SUIT UP AND HEAD OUT!

Of course, unless your game has the initials WC, most people are going to be more interested in your combat engine than your story line. When I first entered combat I thought I was merely looking at an upgraded ARMORED FIST, using Starship Troopers instead of tanks. At higher resolutions, the pixelated feeling fades quite a bit; but it's not until you get into the fourth or fifth campaign scenario that you realize the terrain is as much a part of the game as the weapons and suits. Players will find themselves sneaking through gullies, leaping up and off cliffs, and even shimmying along mountain tops in order to get the drop on enemy installations. This is the first combat sim since M-1 TANK PLATOON where I've found myself instinctively using the terrain to my advantage, instead of just looking at the map and figuring out where the designer wanted me to go. When you add to this a full palette of environmental effects like smoke, rain, fog and even lightning, you

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Circle Reader Service #43.

WHO NEEDS KEVLAR? It may be listed as an "Action" game, but TERRA NOVA comes close to the simulated "realism" of MECHWARRIOR 2 complete with mech-like armored sci-fi soldiers

end up with the best virtual battlefield I've encountered yet.

The biggest problem most players will have with the game is the look of actual combat itself, since most of the time you are shooting at tiny figures almost eclipsed by your targeting reticle. Since most of the combat takes place at the 100-meter range, the only time you ever get to make out the enemy in full DOOM-esque visuals is usually when you make a hideous tactical error and die within moments. Initially this makes combat seem a little dry, but even though this game is classified as an Action title instead of a Sim, what is really happening is that arcade glamour is being sacrificed for "REALISM! Man-sized armored figures are pretty tiny at a 100 meters—but hey, that's life.

Instead of hamming things up, Looking Glass created a combat environment that generates excitement by trying to imitate life. Firefights are not about hand-to-hand brawling but about near-misses, howling tracers, deafening explosions and panicky chatter. Any doubts you may have about the TN combat engine are dispelled on the fourth mission, which happens to be a night-scouting job where you're supposed to sneak into a base, cop some photos and split without being seen. Halfway into the installation I got spotted, and had no choice but to get the info while running full tilt for the hills. I can easily say that no computer game has given me the same kind of adrenaline rush as zigzagging through those moonlit hills with the distant blaring of an alarm klaxon providing counterpoint as lasers bolts zapped over my head, courtesy of the horde of angry Pirate troopers hot on my heels. I was literally gritting my teeth, waiting for the shot with my name on it to take me out before I could get over the hills to the waiting dropship.

And best of all, despite what the box requirements say, this game is playable in low res even on a 486-66, as long as you have at least a fast 2 MB VLB video card.

FINAL DEBRIEFING

While this is definitely my new favorite SF sim, I still have a few small quibbles with TERRA NOVA. The AI is a little too vulnerable to long-range sniping, as if Pirates can't figure out that somebody is shooting unless you show up on their sensors. Your squadmates don't show a lot of personality, and I certainly found myself looking for another formation for them to follow, rather than their annoying single-file routine. I think combat is a little too lethal and fast, leaving much of the potential tactical depth of the game untapped because the environment forces you to run in blasting.

Despite this, Looking Glass has once again upped the ante on a genre, as it did to dungeon hacks with UNDERWORLD and adventure games with SYSTEM SHOCK, by creating an entire environment for players. About the only reality quibble I had was that the game takes into account gravity effects for projectile weapons but not air-density for energy weapons. Ultimately, TERRA NOVA succeeds because above all else, it conveys a real sense of being an armored soldier. Given that, seeing the whites of their eyes doesn't seem as important any more. CG

HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY The pretty terrain in TERRA NOVA is more than just window dressing. Every gully, hill, tree and building are all worked into the combat model—ignore them at your peril

Surviving the Future Battlefield

While TERRA NOVA is a rich tactical game, new players might want to take advantage of these nice tricks.

Given the speed and lethality of the environment, the most important firefight rule to memorize is: KEEP MOVING! In the thick of things, keep zigzagging and use the mouse and lock-on to keep pumping fire into targets. It's less accurate, but if you succumb to the temptation to stop and get the perfect killing shot, it could be your last.

And while we are discussing immediate survival issues, never forget to advance to the rear when those enemy troopers come bounding toward you in an angry swarm. When you have the tech, running backwards while hosing the closest pursuer with long-range particle beam fire is the best way to regroup. Ideally, you want to have enough terrain awareness to back over the top of a hill into cover rather than up against a cliff to be trapped like a rat. Lobbing grenades over the tops of hills is also a good way to punish those who don't want you to leave the party early. And if you are planning to be away long enough to get worked over by your repair specialist, take your parting shots with a rail gun, so your opponents won't be getting better while you're gone.

APPEAL: Any Action junkies with a taste for detailed space combat sims will enjoy this game.

PROS: A polished and detailed simulation of armored combat on alien worlds.

CONS: A little too dry for the DOOM set. Combat and the AI could use a little tweaking as well.

CG RATED ★★★★

TEST YOUR METTLE!

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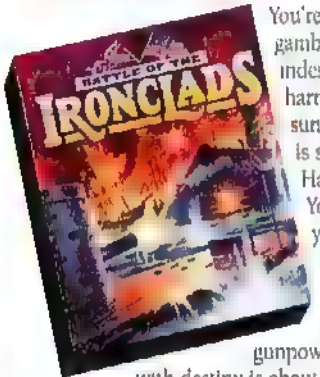

You're captain of the Merrimack, the Confederacy's gamble on future technology, a seemingly indestructible ironclad warship. Union gunfire bounces harmlessly off your metal sides. You've rammed and sunk the wooden warship Cumberland; the Congress is scorching the late afternoon sky. The waters of Hampton Roads are littered with bodies and debris. You're bearing down on the ailing Minnesota for your third kill of the day.

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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY

Road To Ruin

DERBY Rewards The Fine Art Of Reckless Driving

by Gordon Goble

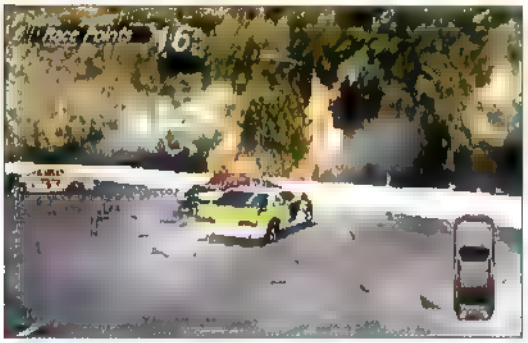
Incredible as it sounds, Psygnosis has just raised car collisions to an art form. DESTRUCTION DERBY true to it name, is all about skull-cracking crashes, buckled body-work, smoking wrecks, and virtually no rules. A brief but spectacular ride, DESTRUCTION is the most realistic car handling short of a full-blown simulation. The DESTRUCTION game plan is a simple one earn the most points in each short race by any means possible. There's no car preparation, no loops and jumps, and no prize winnings. There's not even a speedometer! What there is, however, is a wonderful sensation of aggressive driving.

There's virtually no prep work before you go on your derby of destruction—you just pick your course and "race." Depending on your mood, you may want to take a crack at Wrecking Racing, Stock Car Racing, or Time Trials. If you just crave collisions, a fourth option will plunk you right in the middle of "The Bowl" for an entire series of demolition, where it's simply "hit or be hit."

Once on the track, you'll choose from an in-car perspective or the more traditional arcade chase view. Unfortunately, though the former is like a DOOM on wheels, rear view mirrors are absent and peripheral vision is severely limited, so the exterior view is really the only way to go. DERBY graphics are "just" VGA, but they're good VGA. Cars are admirably colored and shaded, complete with logos and numbers. Trackside scenery includes textured walls, signs and grandstands.

HIT AND RUN Even though you're racing, you'll earn more points for crashes and collisions than winning the lap, so start smashing some cars.

Being the first to the DESTRUCTION DERBY finish line is almost secondary. Sure, you'll pick up some points for winning, but it's the points you snare through contact that scores you the championship. Knocking another vehicle for a complete 360-degree spin is worth as much as winning the whole darn race, a PSH is worth four points, and a 90-degree slam counts for two. Finally, a game that rewards the fine art of reckless driving.



TWISTED METAL DERBY does a great job of portraying nasty bashes, with transparent steam and smoke and progressive car damage.

Before you embark on a racing rampage, however, it must be noted that all cars suffer progressive damage. The more forceful the contact, the worse your beast will perform, and a ton of hard hits may prematurely end your day. Therefore, skilled maneuvers such as a dainty tap to the rear quarter panel of a car in mid-turn or a gentle nudge into an oncoming wall is often the best plan of attack. DERBY tracks, although completely flat and few in number, are designed to encourage contact and include multiple criss-crosses and wide swatches of pavement that funnel into skanky chutes.

Be forewarned that DESTRUCTION DERBY accepts only digital acceleration and braking through joystick buttons 1 and 2. That's a shame considering the wonderful driving model, but even avid simfans like me will find this a thing of simple metal-to-metal delight, just the thing for a quick motorized adrenaline rush.

Price: $50.00
Minimum Requirements: IBM compatible 486 or better, 8 MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, VGA graphics, 25 MB hard drive space; supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards
# of Players: 2 w/ serial link; 16 rotating hot seat
Designer: Reflections
Publisher: Psygnosis
Cambridge, MA
800-922 SONY
Reader Service #: 336

APPEAL: Sim fans who hunger for a simpler crashing alternative to NASCAR RACING, and arcade drivers who'd like a little realism with their crumpled bumpers.

PROS: Nice semi-realism here, and stunning depiction of progressive car damage complete with steam and smoke and bashed body parts.

CONS: Digital gas and brakes can make for a jerky ride. Automatic transmission only, no speedometer or rear view mirrors. The fun is over all too soon.

CG RATED

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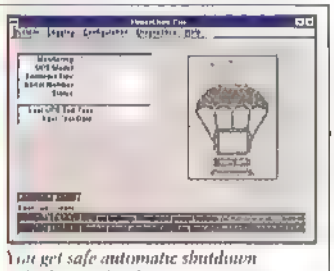

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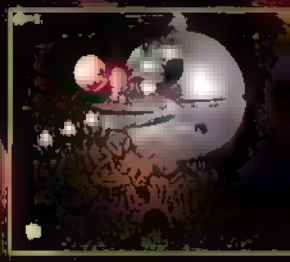

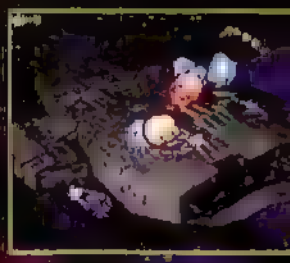

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first true arcade experience for the PC

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30 levels with 5 worlds and 4 warp gates

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Puzzle Politic

"Live–No, Virtual–It's Saturday Night!"

"What's all this I hear about Freedom of the dress? This is just another attempt to keep women wearing dresses.. "

Ms. Latella

"To keep females from wearing pants and expressing their rights as equals "

Ms. Latella, please…

"It's almost as bad as 'journalistic integration.' I tell you "

Ms. Latella! It's "Freedom of the press–the Press! Not the dress!

"Oh, well, then. Nevermind."

POP GOES THE CD

Most multimedia collections of pop culture are better suited to videocassettes than CD-ROM, because there's little real interactivity involved. There are, to be sure, creative and enjoyable exceptions to this rule, such as Peter Gabriel's XPLORA 1 or Monty Python's COMPLETE WASTE OF TIME. It is the success of the latter that Berkeley Systems tries most to emulate with its SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE GOES POLITICAL. Whether you are an "SNL purist" who maintains that the first three seasons are the only "real" ones, or if your loyalties lie with the series' more recent star comedians, you'll find plenty to tickle your funnybone.

The designers try very hard to make us feel politically at home. Opening with ballot boxes using U.S. flags for curtains, the main interface is–you guessed it–the interior of the voting booth, complete with those old-fashioned levers. As you "rock the vote" by flipping a lever, you can relive your favorite *SNL* memories in Quicktime video format. The postage-stamp videos are simultaneously compelling and irritating; yet it's worth a lot of the frustration to hear Emily Latella go on about "Presidental erections" or to see media fixture Tom Snyder (as spoofed by Dan Aykroyd) discuss his reasons for wearing fuzzy pink slippers.

TRY AND VETO THIS! You can pass the entire Contract of America in a single day, plus break your political opponents in *Newt's House*.

While there are plenty of overtly political categories to peruse–Presidents, Politicians, and Elections–other categories range from The Press to The World and finally, to Games. The odd thing with the organization is that the four games listed under the Games category are but a few of the treats in store for *SNL* fans. Even a hardcore gamer is likely to be amused by the rampantly silly "Find the Pope Inna The Pizza" game, with running commentary by none other than Father Guido Sarducci. Problem is, the Pizza game is in the World category, and a casual fan looking more for games than multimedia might miss it entirely.

"SNL GOES POLITICAL cleverly mixes games and multimedia around a central, silly theme."

The point, evidently, is to make you peruse the entire CD. Chances are, you would anyway, but this tactic is sloppy, devious, and worst of all, *not funny*. So why? Probably because NBC is so worried about everyone knowing that *SNL* is its franchise product (as if we wouldn't be aware of that anyway), that they insisted upon the CD being laid out this way. If I'm right, it's just another example of those trained in linear media really not understanding what *interactive* means.

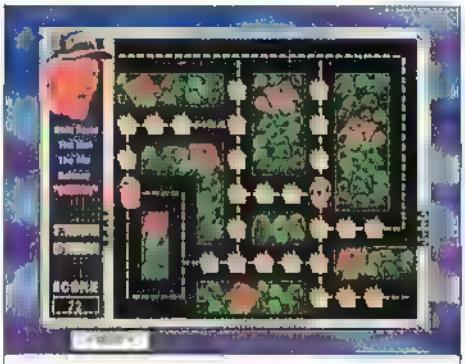
CHECK!

- If you are into puzzles, be sure to check out SMART GAMES, by Smart Games, Inc. While it may "exercise cognitive skills" as claimed, you'll probably have too much fun to worry. Expect a full review next issue.
- Not only has Berkeley released YOU DON'T KNOW JACK XL (twice the questions, twice the quippy fun), but they are also revamping their excellent After Dark screen savers for Win 95 (no, they aren't games, but they are entertaining).

"LET ME MAKE THIS PERFECTLY CLEAR."

So what you have is something that's lacking the complete irreverence of the Monty Python product, or Berkeley's own YOU DON'T KNOW JACK. Does this hurt? Not as much as it could, because the games are full of nostalgia and silliness themselves, a fitting tribute to 20 years of SNL's political commentary.

Road to the White House is basically Pac-Bill, with a caricature of President Clinton gobbling his way through lines of fast food before alert secret service agents can wrestle him safely to the ground. Newt Gingrich is satirized in classic arcade fashion, as the Republican leader's gavel of doom comes down upon defenseless bills, so that the Contract With America can be fulfilled, children can live in a better world—you get the picture. Timed puzzles have you hastily unscrambling pictures of your favorite (or not-so-favorite) politicians.



YOU WANT THOSE FRIES? As with most Pac-style games, the agents following *el presidente* aren't very smart. Just avoid getting trapped in the corners.

The games segue nicely into the video snippets, where the bad fashions, unlikely hairdos and inane comments of movers and shakers from American and world politics are often still as funny as when they originally aired. The limited format of the CD actually helps the lesser jokes, because you cut right to the punch line without having to suffer through the lame set-ups so common the past few years in SNL.

Eventually, you'll tire of the games—unless you've wanted a new PAC-MAN clone for your Pentium—and even the multimedia, funny as it is, will run dry. Even so, SNL GOES POLITICAL is accessible, well-edited, and one of those cases where the whole is more enjoyable than the sum of its parts. Considering the general state of multimedia "entertainment" these days, this product turned out surprisingly well—enough to keep you busy until Berkeley Systems decides to do YOU DON'T KNOW JACK 2.

CG TIPS!

Maurice Ashley Teaches Chess—If you are having trouble beating the computer, go back to the multimedia lessons on endgames, where the computer is surprisingly good. Also concentrate on developing your positional play before tackling the AI at its top two levels.

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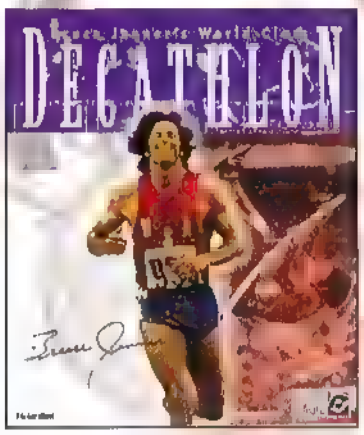

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Love's Labors Lost

Are The Stat-based Sports Companies Being Pushed Off The Field?

It's no secret that many of today's computer gamers cut their teeth on dice-activated board games long before the personal computer revolutionized the way we play. Believe it or not, back then, great graphics often meant a wargame map that featured several shades of brown to distinguish hills from mountains. How exciting! An improved statistical model in a baseball sim could be as simple as using three dice instead of two to generate runs, hits, and errors. And of course, role playing games required a flesh-and-blood game master, not a CPU, to control the pace. A few companies dominated the market in that era: Avalon Hill, SPI, and TSR all held the wargame or RPG high ground at different points, while APBA and Strat-O-Matic battled each other for sports gaming dollars in a rivalry that's lasted since JFK was in office.

Now, of course, everything's different. It seems like every month brings a new release with mega-graphics that not only push the technology envelope, but also give gamers a not-so-gentle shove along the path to the next hardware upgrade. Did you CATCH FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO 96's great looking player animation? Only if you were running at least a 486/66. You can bet the ranch that you'll need a Pentium for the '97 version.

So, it's only natural that some gamers look back wistfully at the days when life was simple—at least life's sports gaming side. Who recalls excitedly poring over Inter's columns on brand-new APBA player cards, or trying to fathom STRAT-O-MATIC's secret formula for assigning fielders' ratings? If you remember, perhaps you're one of the many table-top loyalists who migrated along as dice-and-card game companies converted their products over to PCs. The computer versions of games like APBA and STRAT-O-MATIC were the product of a life and death struggle against looming competition by the graphics-oriented sports sims from large, well-capitalized software houses, a David and Goliath battle that rages on.

> **"For the stat-based sims to survive, they have to offer modem play and better customer service."**

DAVID VS. GOLIATH

What's more, it's not just the old-time board game companies tilting at the corporate windmills of the big game publishers. A mixed bag of mom-and-pop software operations offer full-blown commercial sports game products in an effort to grab their slice of the pigskin, puck, or cowhide. While industry leader Patrick Cook presides over the highly successful FRONT PAGE empire at Dynamix, sports nut Dave Koch busily churns out code in a Wisconsin garage, tweaking his fine text-based NFL sim, ACTION PC FOOTBALL. Actually, I don't know if Dave Koch even has a garage, but the image of the little guy burning the midnight oil in a labor of love holds true. After all, isn't that the stuff of legends in the personal computer industry? It's a wonder, really, that these small publishers are able to buck the odds and survive, considering professional sports licensing fees, limited (usually mail order) distribution networks, and an overall lack of pizzazz

ON DECK

- Dynamix is currently revamping the engine undergirding the venerable FRONT PAGE SPORTS PRO FOOTBALL series for FRONT PAGE SPORTS PRO FOOTBALL '97. While you're waiting, though, you might want to try out the strategies in next month's magazine and CD-ROM.
- Electronic Arts is allegedly working on a new MARIO ANDRETTI racing game. Expected to appear first on the Sony PlayStation, the game is expected to feature at least three types of vehicles to race—a first to our knowledge in the console market.
- 3DO Studios is reported to be working with Stormfront Studios (of TONY LARUSSA BASEBALL fame) on a baseball game for the PC. The project would unite EARL WEAVER BASEBALL publisher Trip Hawkins (then CEO/President of Electronic Arts) with EWB producer Don Daglow (now President of Stormfront).

compared to the higher profile products. While FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO '96 and Accolade's UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS dominated the shelves at software retailers this past football season, you'd only have stumbled upon ACTION PC FOOTBALL if you scanned the small ads in the back of sports magazines.

How do the little guys do it? Perhaps they've found their niche in sports gaming—statistics. After all, table-top baseball games have been around since at least the early 60s, so they've had plenty of time to perfect their stat models. Gamers know they're getting a reasonably accurate simulation of actual results, which is more than can be said for some of the graphics-oriented sims, with their 4,000 yard rushers, all-too-frequent 1-0 hockey scores, and home run hitters whose output regularly eclipses the best production of Babe Ruth and Roger Maris. This is a real bone

BACKFIELD IN MOTION UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS 96 may emulate the mechanics of a good running game, but for realism, you're still better off with an old-fashioned stat-based football sim.

of contention for the stat-oriented game publishers, who, quite naturally, see their type of product as the Holy Grail of sports gaming. One designer told CGW he'd tried several times to shop his baseball game's well-regarded statistics engine to major publishers as a means of giving their graphical sims a better foundation, but had been rebuffed. He came away with the impression that the larger companies believe that graphics are what sell, and most consumers don't really care about the underlying statistical precision. Could they be right?

Text-based and stat-oriented games also appeal to upgrade *refuseniks* who can't or won't send their credit card on a fly pattern just to keep up with the latest full motion video, live announcer sports sim. Heck, many of the less-demanding stat-based games will run easily on even a 386, allowing sports junkies to get their numbers fix and still have a few dollars left to buy tickets to a real game once in a while.

Stat-oriented sims have history on their side, too. When you purchase a STRAT-O-MATIC or an APBA, you know you're buying into decades of sports simulation experience. Other games, like Lance Haffner's FULL COUNT BASEBALL, have a track record of several years to rely upon. There's a certain reassurance that comes from knowing a publisher depends on your purchase for his livelihood, and that the product will be there year after year, with updates, past season disks, and other game-related add-ons.

With the bigger companies' sports products, you have to wonder whether your favorite sim will survive the annual shareholders' meeting. Think it can't happen? Guess again. In a recent example, MicroProse has dropped ULTIMATE FOOTBALL like a slippery pigskin after just two seasons. Let's hope you didn't invest too much time in ULTIMATE FOOTBALL's play book editor, designing a custom offense for a game that's now as defunct as the single wing.

For all their virtues, you have to wonder about the survivability factor of the stat-oriented sports sim in a gaming market where 3-D video is the latest buzz. To hold on against the big boys, small publishers must emphasize what they do best—the little differences that set them apart from their corporate brethren.

THE SMALL COMPANY PLAYBOOK

Where can small companies make their mark? Customer service is paramount. Publishers must know the gamers who buy their product, and be responsive to their needs. I speak from personal experience when I say that, sadly, this isn't always the case. Some firms just don't get it, customer relations-wise. Do you have a modem? Do you use e-mail? Of course you do.

Amazingly, some small companies don't even have an Internet address, much less a Web Page. Hello? This is 1996, guys! Perhaps even more frustrating, others have e-mail, but don't answer inquiries promptly, if at all. We've come to expect the impersonal treatment from the software bureaucracies, but from a little firm, the snub feels so much more personal.

And, say, Mr. Small Company CEO, here's a question that you don't need a Harvard MBA to answer. What's better than one lonely customer playing a sports game solitaire? Why, 28 frenzied customers busily engaged in league play, of course. It's a surprising fact that many of the stat-based sims completely ignore the possibilities of the modem. With the old-line companies, this is probably because their customers have a 30-year history of organizing Play By Mail (PBM) leagues. Well, guess what?

As a veteran of many PBM leagues in my dice and card days, I'm here to tell you that I'm not going to lick stamps anymore. I want direct modem play and I'm not the only one.

Finally, small publishers should do what they do best, and not get caught up in on-screen gimmicks in a futile effort to compete with graphics-intensive games. The type of gamer who leans towards NHL 96 or TONY LARUSSA BASEBALL is not going to switch to a stat-based sim just because it features an optional mouse-activated bat and ball graphic. Yet, in a questionable allocation of resources, one company is adding such a module to its '96 version. Professional athletes often use the term, "Stay within yourself." It means play your own game, and don't try to be something you're not. Stat-based game companies should take heed.

Make no mistake, this is a niche market. Small publishers ignore this fact at their own peril. It would be a shame—our loss as well as theirs—to eventually see the little fish in sports gaming gobbled up by a hungry school of officially-licensed, multimedia sports extravaganzas, too many of which turn out to be all icing and no cake.

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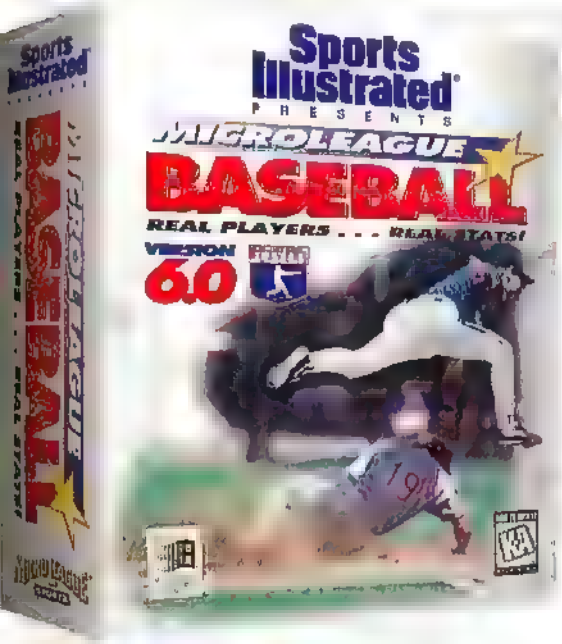

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Get Net: It Pays

Online Resources Breath New Life Into Aging Flight Sims

If you're in that ever-shrinking percentile of sim fans who haven't gotten online yet, you're really missing out. Head-to-head play beats even the best computer AI any day, but even if you prefer to fly alone, there are dozens of resources on the Internet and online services that can make sim flying a much richer experience. New missions, team campaigns, program patches, introductory guides, and plain old post-combat bull sessions are just a few of the reasons to log on.

If SU-27 FLANKER is your game, point your web browser at Mike Joseph's Unofficial SU-27 FLANKER Homepage, http://mwlink.com/~mikej/su27.html. Here you'll find a virtual aviation school, with weekly missions designed to get new fliers up to speed in a competitive "top gun" campaign environment; the X-campaign, an on-going multiplayer campaign; a growing collection of custom missions; FAQ and help files; and the most current patch.

Eric Joiner, who created the Virtual Fighter Command site for TORNADO fliers (http://www.mindspring.com/~ejoiner/vfc/vfc.html), now has an SU-27 page as well at http://www.gltweb.com/SU27/index.html. This page complements Joseph's page with additional resources, including a bulletin board-style discussion area. If you still can't get enough SU-27 talk, send email with the words "subscribe flanker" to majordomo@wkac.uk to join the FLANKER mailing list.

EF2000 fliers should check out http://www.ef2000.com, home of the 1st Eurofighter Air Wing. Along with a discussion area, tech support, and FAQ info, you'll find a base directory where you can locate other EF2000 pilots. Among the useful info on The 1st Canadian Tactical Eurofighter Group page at http://www.cyberark.bc.ca/~lcnh/cf2.htm is a guide to hacking modem play into the current version of EF2000, using the KALI Internet multiplayer software.

USNF, MARINE FIGHTERS, and ATF are also well represented on the web. The Wildbunch page, http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/eduffy/WILDBNCH.htm, sports screen shots, custom missions, and a campaign, along with a helpful bunch of USNF fanatics who are happy to help folks troubleshoot any problems they're having with the game.

No matter what your favorite sim is, you're bound to find information on it online. There are hundreds of sim-related sites. A good place to start are discussion areas, where you can meet other sim pilots and find the hot spots online. On CompuServe, GO FSFORUM. On AOL, go to keyword FLIGHT. And on the Internet, check out the comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.flight-sim newsgroup, as well as the new web-based flight sim discussion forum from those wacky Happy Puppy folks and my columnar predecessor, Tom "KC" Basham, at http://happypuppy.com/flight/index.html.

> **"Without a modem connection to the rest of the sim world, you're just playing with yourself."**

ON THE RADAR

Spectrum HoloByte has finally lifted the cone of silence from FALCON 4.0. This Windows 95 F-16C simulator drops you in the cockpit during an air and land war set in the Korean peninsula. Look for the sim to be the anti-TOP GUN, upping the realism ante significantly with over 10 radar modes, more than 10 HUD modes, and avionics support for Wild Weasel anti-radar missions. Look for AWACS coverage in combat, and much better team AI from your wingmen. FALCON 4.0 will support multiplayer play using networks, modems, direct cable connections, and online via the Total Entertainment Network (TEN). The sim will support 3-D graphics cards, so look for some amazing graphics. And taking a cue from BACK TO BAGHDAD, FALCON 4.0 will support hooking up an old Hercules graphics card and monitor to provide a second screen displaying your radar output. Spectrum's not giving dates yet, but you'll probably have more luck getting this sim from your valentine than from Santa.

PATCHED PATCHES

Last month I took a look at patches for some recent flight sims. Of course, as you'd expect in the Mach 2 world of flight sims, those patches have been patched.

If you installed the F-F2000 2.0 patch, you're probably reading this magazine because interaction with your computer is liable to result in $3,000 worth of hardware being tossed out a second-story window. When DID decided to make EF2000 more challenging, they overdid it. Enemy missiles became super-effective, while your own couldn't hit the broad side of a fjord. DID recently followed up with another update, 2.01, which balances play quite a bit. We'll have 2.01 on next month's CG-ROM, or you can get it from http://www.did.com if you don't want to wait. In the meantime, practice on version 2.0, and 2.01 will seem like a piece of cake.

SSI's Su-27 FLANKER has also seen more upgrades, up to 1.1 Beta 4 as of this writing. Along with clouds, a better field of view, fine-tuned instruments, and improvements in the mission editor, comes the Holy Grail, head-to-head play! The 1.1 update is designed to play over an IPX network. However, you can also fly over a modem connection if one player owns the Microsoft Plus! add-on for Win 95, which contains the Dial-Up Networking (DUN) host application. One player installs the DUN host, and the other calls up. If everything's configured properly, you'll be able to play over a modem connect. Some players have even tried using TCP/IP to play over the Internet, but apparently the lag times are too long and the play is too jerky to enjoy.

CG TIPS!

Advanced Tactical Fighters: If you're having problems with [illegible] modem connection, make sure that [illegible] turned off. Copying the pilot [illegible] string, to AT-MO (that's a zero, not an oh, will work for [illegible].

Want to try your hand at [illegible] Quake Mission Pack 1? Find the autoexec.bat for your computer and [illegible] .bat, and [illegible].

If [illegible] joy[illegible] stick, you can [illegible] 0 character the command for centering yet to set [illegible]. You'll find planes like the X-31 much more controllable.

Send your flight and space sim tips to cgletters@zd.com, and you may see your name in print!

Circle Reader Service #121

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Circle Reader Service #57

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY

Plane Jane's

It Doesn't Look Much Better Than U.S. Navy Fighters, But Multiplayer Action Gives ATF Wings Of Its Own

by Denny Atkin

Jane's All the World's Aircraft is the bible of the aviation industry, and *Jane's Defence Weekly* is the magazine that military planners read if they want to know what cool toys the country next door is buying. Now the *Jane's* name has come into play in the flight simulation arena, with the new Jane's Combat Simulations series from Electronic Arts and Origin.

The first entry in the series, ADVANCED TACTICAL FIGHTERS (ATF), is essentially U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS 3.0, with six new aircraft, new campaign scenarios, multiplayer modes, and multimedia reference video from Jane's. These elements are individually enticing; together, they combine to update an aging flight-sim engine into an original, compelling game that's worth a look for USNF veterans and new fliers alike.

Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486 DX2-66 or higher (Pentium 60 for SVGA), 8 MB RAM, MS-DOS 5.0 or higher, 30 MB hard disk space, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM, mouse, supports a wide variety of sound cards
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designers: Andre Gagnon and Brent Iverson
Publisher: Jane's Combat Simulations, San Mateo, CA, (415) 571-7171
Reader Service #: 337

AURORA EXPLODIALIS Closing on targets like the Aurora spyplane is easy, thanks to six simultaneous multifunction displays, including a new radar cross-section indicator.

SEE JANE'S PLANES

Once you get past the exhilarating opening video, you'll come to a main screen that's nearly identical to USNF's. Three styles of missions are offered: Single Missions, mostly against the French; Quick Missions, where you can pit planes of your choice against each other; and Campaign Missions. The Campaign is actually a series of missions strung together—missions always progress in the same order, and you simply have a limited number of allowed failures. There's also a Mission Builder, unchanged from earlier games in the series. As before, a Vehicle Info button gives you details on the various aircraft in the sim; the new Player Aircraft Reference includes video and information from Jane's on the aircraft you'll fly in the sim.

Although the structure of the missions is unchanged, you'll find more variety and a few surprises when you head into combat. The game has a staggering 90 aircraft models and variants, and missions range from typical airbase raids to escorting Aurora spyplanes.

You'll also find the play experience different due to the hardware you'll be flying. The F-22 is carried over from USNF, but this one has a fine-tuned flight model and now sports vectoring thrust. The F-117A Nighthawk and B-2 Spirit stealth aircraft give you a chance to try your hand at clandestine strike missions (or use the "load any weapons" cheat to pack the B-2 with 72 Phoenixes and see if you can take out an entire air force with one plane).

The Dassault Rafale is an agile French strike fighter that can give even the F-22 a run for the money.

In the fantasy realm, you'll find the X-29 FSW forward-swept-wing craft, as well as the X-31 EFM thrust-vectoring testbed. Neither of these aircraft will ever go into service in reality, but ATF arms them and lets you try them in combat. Finally, there's the X-32, based on Lockheed's entry in the JAST competition for an aircraft to replace the Harrier, F-16, and F/A-18. This aircraft only exists on paper in reality, but you can fly it in ATF now.

New tactics come into play with all of these planes: the F-22, F-117A, B-2, and Rafale are all stealthy, and you'll want to use that advantage to sneak past incidental enemies on the way to the target. The X-29's big plus is amazing maneuverability; the X-31 and X-32 can vector their thrust, allowing you to pull amazing angles of attack and point your plane's nose up to 60 degrees off the current velocity vector, making for some truly exciting gun shots. In Quick Mission mode, you can also fly most of the USNF and MARINE FIGHTERS aircraft, such as the F-14 and Harrier.

SEE JANE'S RUN

The flight engine has seen some minor but welcome tweaks since it was last upgraded for the MARINE FIGHTERS data disk. The cockpit graphics serve no function other than holding up the rear-view mirror available on some planes. Radar, status, weapons, and other instrument displays appear in pop-up windows. While

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XENOPHAGE

Alien Bloodsport

FormGen INCORPORATED

Developed by Argo Games
Published by Apogee Software, Ltd.
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APOGEE

Circle Reader Service #247

Advanced Tactical Tuning

By default, the instrument windows obscure a lot of your field of view. In higher resolution modes, turn off "Large Windows" using the View menu. This will not only make instrument windows smaller, but it also allows you to fit six instruments on screen instead of only four.

Want to see how the game's frame rate is affected by various graphics options? Hitting Ctrl-F will display the current number of frames displayed per second.

Installing the game to use MIDI music instead of digital music not only saves some 30MB of hard disk space, but it also speeds up the game noticeably.

some purists argue that this detracts from the game's realism, it's actually a very functional compromise given the limited real estate of a computer monitor compared to the panorama of a real cockpit and canopy. ATF increases the number of simultaneous pop-ups from four to six in higher resolutions, giving you more data onscreen.

Outside the cockpit, it's a flashback to last year's sim technology. While the hi-res graphics are crisp (resolutions up to 1024x768 are supported), the relatively flat terrain polygons, simple texture maps, and medium-detailed aircraft have a cartoonish feel once you've seen EF2000. ATF's appeal is in its gameplay, not its pretty face. There are some minor, but welcome, new graphics touches. Most impressive of these is are the new aircraft explosions. When you take out a bogey, it will often lose part (or all) of a wing, display huge gashes in the fuselage, or even break in half. The engine's been fine-tuned a bit, and should run faster on 486 PCs. On the sound side, a digital music option improves the quality of the tunes for the MIDI-less.

The view hat on the CH FlightStick Pro and Thrustmaster FCS joysticks is now used to control thrust vectoring; on planes without vectoring, it's useless. ATF does support the new dual-hatted CH CombatStick, giving you a second hat for view control.

RUN, JANE'S, RUN

ATF was already in the works when EA signed on with Jane's, so you won't see much evidence of the alliance in the game's realism level. The game remains moderately realistic — the planes exhibit appropriate performance differences (an F-22 can fly circles around an F-4), but often they don't match up with the real planes' capabilities.

The Jane's connection comes into play with the new multimedia reference section. Each of the planes is spec'd out in detail, with internal drawings, performance data, and numerous images. You'll also find videos highlighting the development, control surfaces, and special maneuvers of each of the seven flyable aircraft. This is backed up by a wonderful, spiral-bound manual that elicits memories of MicroProse manuals of years past. Complete descriptions from *Jane's All the World's Aircraft* are included for each flyable plane. There's also a superb keyboard and command reference card, a needed and welcome addition that other sim developers should try to match.

SHOOT SPOT DOWN

The most compelling new feature in ATF is its multiplayer support. Up to eight players can fly over an IPX network, or you can go head-to-head using a modem or direct serial connection. You can fly any of the Single Missions or Quick Missions here. The Quick Mission interface sports a number of options to enhance multiplayer mode: You can set up a free-for-all battle, or divide players into two sides; time and kill limits are adjustable, as are the number of lives a player is allowed; and you can choose how many kills constitutes a win. Both missile and guns-only combat are allowed. The action is smooth as silk in multiplayer mode, with no warping or jumpiness at all in network play or over a 14,400 bps modem connection.

What makes the multiplayer a real blast is that you can fly *any* aircraft in the sim. Set up a MiG-21 vs. F-4 Phantom battle, put an A-10 against a Harrier, or take control of a lumbering C-5 Galaxy and see if your friends can escort you home alive. A total of 90 different aircraft (counting camouflage variations) are available, including bombers, fighters, helicopters, and transports.

Stripped of multiplayer mode, ATF is little more than another USNF data disk with a nice multimedia aircraft encyclopedia. But once you take on a human player, the game takes on new life, and becomes one of the most purely *fun* flight simulator experiences in existence today. If you have a friend with ATF and a modem, you must buy this game. Otherwise, you might considering buying them a copy. And a modem, if need be. You won't regret it.

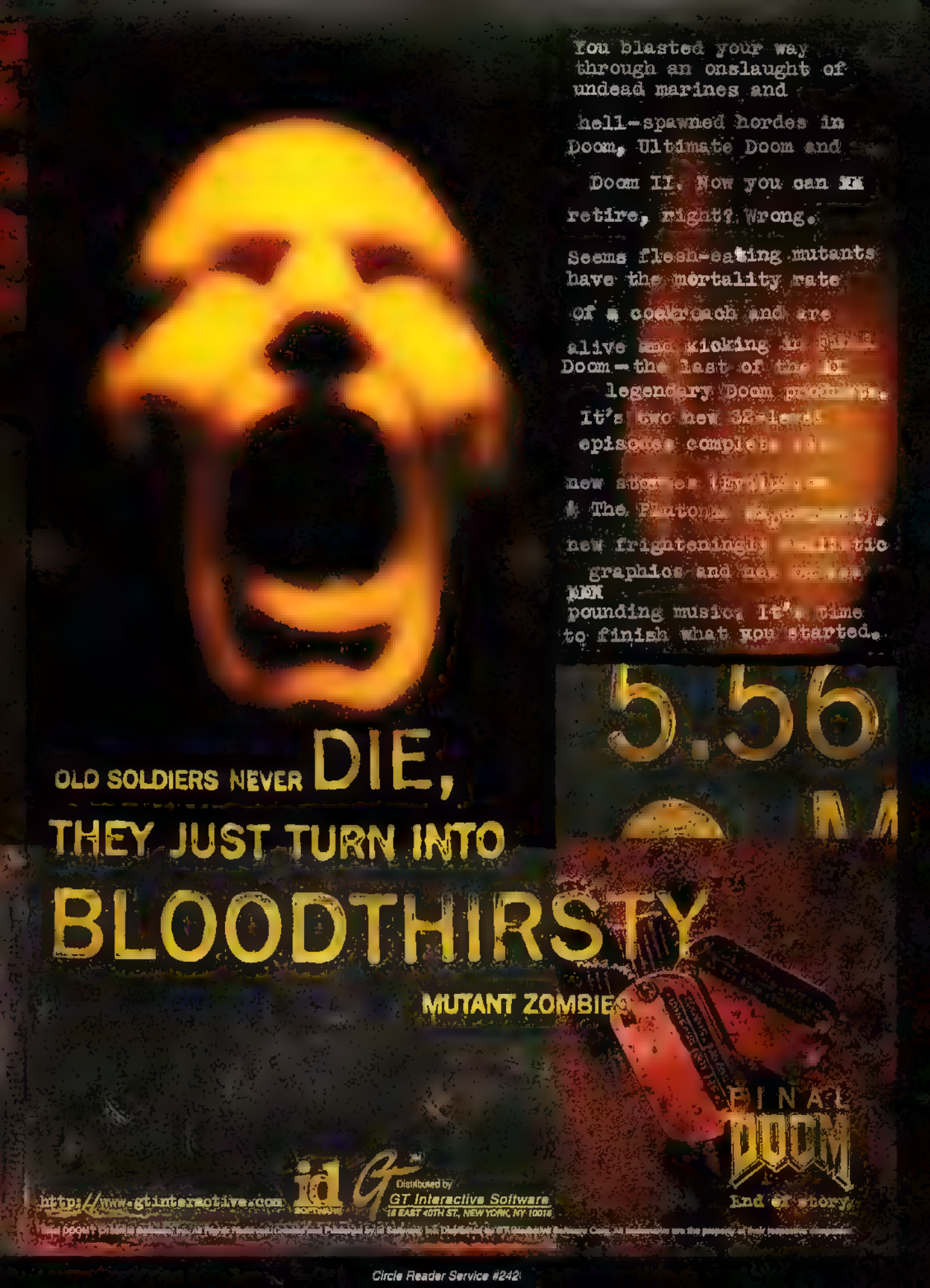
DASSAULT AND BATTERY A French Dassault Super Etendard falls victim to ATF's improved F-22 Lightning II

APPEAL: USNF fans looking for new action; anyone with an interest in multiplayer flight simulation.

PROS: The most entertaining, flyable multiplayer simulation yet. The advanced X-planes simulated here force even experienced sim fliers to develop new tactics.

CONS: Graphics engine is dated, and you can only fly the full complement of aircraft in multiplayer mode.

CG RATED ★★★★



Circle Reader Service #242

EASY
DIFFICULTY LEVEL

Silent Thud

Under All The Pretty New Makeup, It's The Same Old A-10

by Scott A. May

Jet fighter sims can be a detached experience. Bogeys appear as blips on long-range radar screens, identified and dispatched with perfunctory ease. Ground targets may offer visual sightings, but thanks to laser-guided ordnance, you can be long gone before impact occurs. In short, the fighter pilot is distanced from the immediate action, in all its smoke and glory, like some veiled avenger.

Sierra's SILENT THUNDER A-10 TANK KILLER 2 drops you out of the clouds and right into the caldron of up-close and personal air combat. Nicknamed "Warthog" for its ungainly appearance, the A-10 Thunderbolt II is the modern equivalent to the fabled Trojan Horse—a lumbering giant capable of unleashing hell's fury on any ground target in its path. Designed to fly low, long and hard, the A-10's major claim to fame is its "tank killer" capability, courtesy of the GAU-8A Avenger gun. Mounted beneath its nose cone, this massive seven-barreled Gatling-style weapon can fire milk bottle-sized 30mm shells at a blistering rate of up to 70 rounds per second. A split-second burst is all that's needed to reduce a main battle tank to a flaming pile of molten shreds. In many ways, it's like shooting fish in a barrel, except these fish are armed to the gills and don't hesitate to fire back.

BOOM TOWN Follow the winding roads and you'll find plenty of targets of opportunity that blow up real good.

Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486 DX2-66 or higher (Pentium recommended), 8 MB RAM (12 MB recommended), Windows 95, 35 MB hard disk space, SVGA, 2x CD ROM (4x recommended), mouse or joystick, supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards.
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Dynamix
Publisher: Sierra On-Line
P.O. Box 3404
Salinas, CA 93912
(800) 757-7707
Reader Service #: 328

DEJU VU ALL OVER AGAIN

Designed for Windows 95, the game marks the third remodeling effort by Dynamix to breathe life into this venerable title, originally released in 1989 for DOS and Amiga. In the game's timeline, the Air Force has virtually eliminated the A-10 from active duty. Its new role is that of private (read: covert) deployment to enforce U.S. policy objectives in countries such as Korea, Columbia and the Gulf, weeding out terrorists, drug lords and the like. Another important shift: A-10s now fly mostly solitary missions, backed only by reconnaissance planes and the occasional Apache gunship. Combined with a new variety of locales—from flat desert to rugged mountain terrain—and improved enemy AI, the skills required to command this formidable beast have changed dramatically since the earlier game.

The game's visible improvement is a complete graphics facelift. The flat polygons of the past are still there, but they're now 3-D texture-mapped and light-source shaded, using Dynamix's updated 3Space technology. Thanks to SVGA resolution, the devil's in the details, including magnificent multicolored explosions, realistic smoke, fire and mist effects, highly defined buildings and aircraft markings. Terrain features such as roads, rivers and shorelines are not only pleasing to the eye, but important for navigation. Using a combination of hotkeys and mouse controls, you can view the action from virtually any angle. The graphics look best when viewed from a distance; up close it's the same old carpet of blocky polygons, and occasional glitches cause objects to be visible through terrain. The game uses DirectDraw, supporting either a windowed display or full-screen, at a maximum of 640x480 resolution. An unattractive low-res option is available for slower machines.

CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Many of the game's missions can be flown individually, with a Best Mission vanity board recording your highest scores. You'll need to fly the full 24-mission campaign mode to access all the missions, though. Campaign missions are linked together, with your performance in previous outings affecting subsequent see-

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"I can't shake him!" Cries your wing man as the MIG matches his every move.

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FLYING TANK The Warthog will take a lot of damage, which is good since Fairchild seems to have left the ejection seat out when they built your A-10

narios. Skill variables include three threat levels and adjustable realism (limited or unlimited ammunition, normal or invincible damage). A special training mission, with on-line verbal cockpit assistance, helps novices earn their wings.

Due to the variety of mission objectives—essentially, anti-tank, air support or interdiction—and potential enemy resistance, the game places heavy emphasis on pre-flight weapons loadout. Beyond tanks—mere cannon fodder for the A-10—you'll also be facing a diverse range of aircraft, anti-aircraft units, radar sites, boats, bridges, buildings and unarmed transports. Four pre-set weapons loads are available, based on mission briefings, or you can customize it yourself from a hefty list of bombs, rockets and missiles.

Enemy AI is considerably juiced up from previous versions of the game, especially when set at the aggressive threat level. Play difficulty is also much greater, primarily due to your lone wolf status. Wingmen do appear in select missions, although communications is not an option. The HUD and cockpit displays are somewhat muddled, but since you're moving so low to the ground (typically 200 feet or less), you'll end up flying by sight most of the time. The game supports the usual collection of high-end analog flightsticks, throttles, and rudder pedals. For Windows 95, a digital joystick, such as Microsoft's Sidewinder, is the optimal way to go.

Control response felt sluggish in the heat of battle; the flight model doesn't appear to have been upgraded at all from the ancient A-10 1.5. Flight characteristics that were acceptable seven years ago feel *weird* now. A dumbed-down flight model is acceptable, even appropriate, in a beginner's sim, but if you've learned how real planes respond to control inputs, you'll likely have trouble handling the unresponsive A-10 in this game.

Other sundry improvements to the game include crisp radio chatter and superb stereo sound effects. Beyond such chrome and glitter, veteran A-10 pilots will find the basics of gameplay fundamentally unchanged, though.

MANUAL: MIA

Like some other recent Sierra games, SILENT THUNDER ships without a printed manual. All background material and system specs are instead contained in an on-line help document, accessible only from the main menu screen or through Win95's Explorer. On-line help may be fine for non-gaming applications, as a supplement to a printed manual, but it makes a poor substitute for having written reference material at hand. You can print out desired information, but it's a hassle. Making the best of a bad situation, I'll admit there are some advantages to on-line help: hypertext jumps to related material, plus the ability to quickly search the manual for specific topics. This is one trend I hope doesn't catch on.

As combat flight sims go, SILENT THUNDER doesn't exactly shake the rafters or add anything new to the genre, beyond its Win 95 platform. Veteran Warthog warriors will enjoy the game's graphic overhaul and new mission selection, but they'll likely be disappointed by the inattention to improvements in other areas. If you're an absolute flight sim beginner, or if you're looking for an arcade action adrenaline release and you're extra-willing to suspend disbelief, SILENT THUNDER may be worth a look.

SILENT THUNDER's archaic flight model has turned many experienced flight sim fans off. It's not that it's not deadly accurate—many sim fliers enjoy simpler games like USNF—it's that the plane just doesn't fly as an A-10 should. The real A-10 is a fairly nimble bird, while SILENT THUNDER's flies more like a B-52 hit by a shrinking ray. Turns and throttle control also don't feel right to experience fliers.

Dynamix has heard the cries of sim fans, and is issuing a patch which should be available online by the time you read this. A second flight model will be added that's still not deadly accurate, but should fly much more like a real A-10. Also planned in this free update are fixes for sound and joystick problems, and a new eight-mission mini-campaign called "The Secret War."

APPEAL: Action gamers looking for a starter flight sim; nostalgic players of the original A-10 games.

PROS: Target-rich environment with spectacular explosions, stereo sound effects and much-improved graphics.

CONS: Unrealistic—not just simplified—flight modeling and poor plane handling. No paper manual. Beyond updated appearance and more timely mission specs, gameplay isn't much different from original DOS and Amiga versions.

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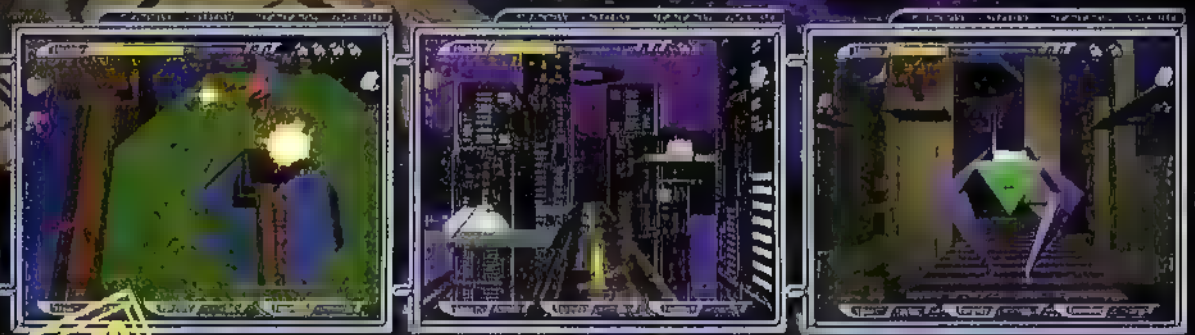
SOULTRAP



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Circle Reader Service #120

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

Run Silent, Run Deep

SSI Sends You On Patrol In The Long-Neglected Pacific Theater

by Kevin Turner

Modern submariners look at their World War II counterparts with something akin to hero worship. There is a special pin these men wear, one which has not been awarded since WW II. That pin is the Submarine War Patrol pin, and it designates the wearer as a submarine combat veteran. These men went to war with boats of steel, and sank those boats on purpose in order to attack stealthily. Not only did they attack, but they paid the price by being attacked right back. They returned with an unmatched war record to a grateful nation.

Unfortunately, the mortality rate for submariners of WW II was astronomical. There are many boats listed as "Still on Patrol" in the Pacific. One of the chief roles of the WW II submarine veterans who survived is to make sure that we, as a nation, remember their sacrifice.

SSI's SILENT HUNTER's attempts to refresh that memory by recreating the experiences of submariners in the Pacific theater during WW II. For authenticity's sake, SSI brought a distinguished WW II submariner on board as a technical advisor. LCDR William "Bud" Gruner joined the submarine service in 1939, and took command of the *USS Skate* during 1944. Gruner's involvement gave SSI the benefit of much real-life experience.

LOADED DECK If you've eliminated the escorts and you're feeling gutsy, you can try a deck gun attack.

Price: $79.95
System Requirements. IBM compatible 486-66 or higher, 8 MB RAM, DOS 5.0 or higher, VESA-compatible SVGA, 2x CD-ROM, mouse, supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards
Protection. None (CD must be in drive)
Designers: William T. Becker and Kim Biscoe
Publisher: SSI, Sunnyvale, CA, (800) 601-7529
Reader Service #: 340

WET RUN

As with all submarine games, the first thing I wanted to do was put this boat to sea and see what she had. I chose a Single Mission and decided that taking on a light merchant convoy would be a good shakedown cruise. I set the realism at 100 percent, and landed in the control room of an S-class diesel boat.

Once on board, I took a quick tour of the boat and checked out what she had to offer. I was pleased to find that all the controls, from inclinometers to engine order telegraphs, are accurately depicted. The compass rose is easy to discern, and making depth changes can be easily accomplished by setting depth manually or by one-keypress commands to come to periscope depth or radar depth, crash dive, blow main ballast, or surface.

The chart is an absolute pleasure to use, allowing you to set navigational points quickly and easily. The zoom feature is particularly handy, and is critical when setting up an attack. Orders can be sent to the ship's controls without leaving chart mode.

The radar is accurately rendered, you'll find it extremely useful for locating targets and obtaining range information. Radar was one of the edges that allowed US submarines to operate so successfully, and was an early indicator of the need for advanced technology in weapon platforms.

The bridge contains repeaters for the ship's control equipment, as well as a set of "big eyes." Known as the TBT, or Target Bearing Transmitter, these extra-large binoculars allow surface engagement of targets by sending data to the Target Data Computer (TDC), much as is done with a periscope. For the artillery-inclined, there is a deck gun which can be fired manually or automatically.

The TDC is the true gem of the control room. This device can be set to operate in automatic or manual mode. In automatic, the target information is automatically fed to the TDC. As confidence

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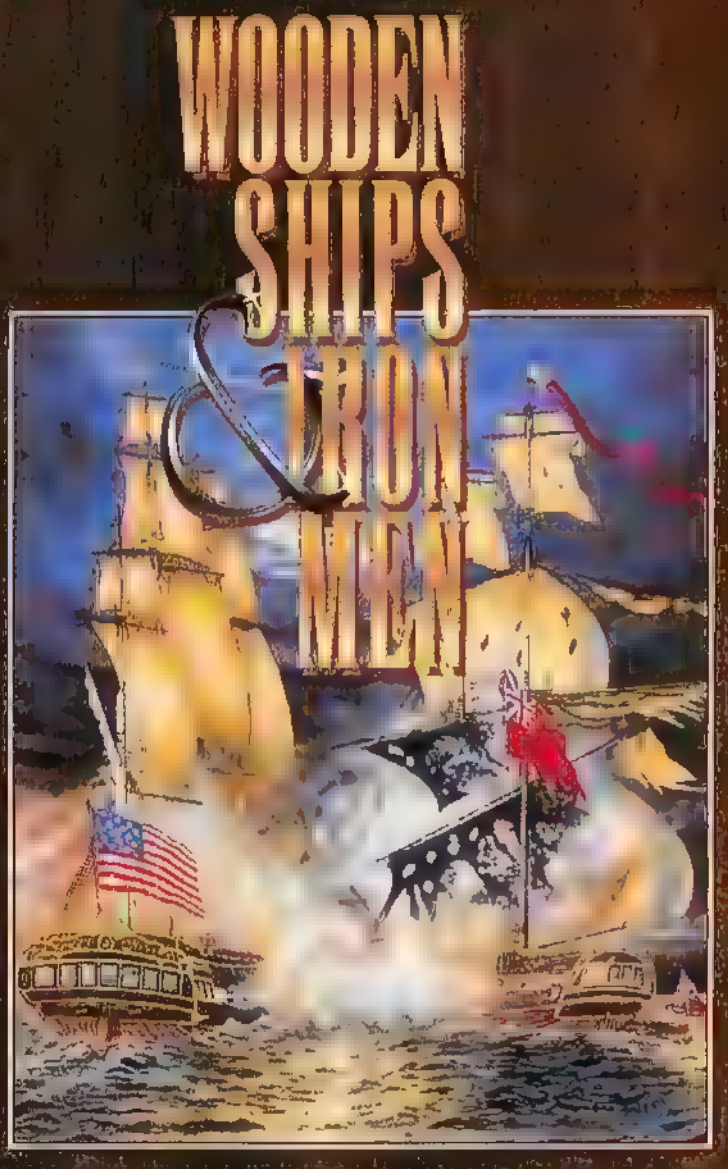

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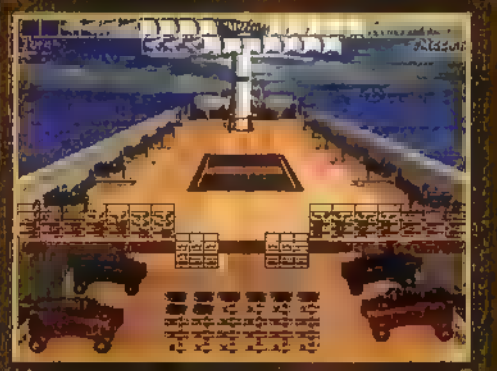

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Circle Reader Service #167

in the target solution is gained, a small gauge in the TDC mirrors the level of confidence. The target solution is fed into the weapon in the form of a gyro angle. In manual, all readings must be manually fed into the TDC. These readings are used to formulate a target solution, which is then fed to the weapon.

The TDC is my favorite feature of SILENT HUNTER. I play the game with the TDC in manual wherever it's practical. When faced with multiple hostile targets, manual play is entirely too time consuming. Automatic mode allows you to maintain the big picture without acceding to TDC tunnel-vision. But I highly recommend that you become familiar with the TDC in manual, and use it whenever possible, in order to experience the full measure of the game.

PATROL ORDERS

If you just want to sit down and play a single mission, you'll find SILENT HUNTER presents a multitude of opportunities. There are numerous historic missions, where famous submarine actions are recreated, including those of admiral "Bud" Gruner. You can also set up encounters with merchant ships and warships, as well as patrol encounters. In these encounters, you'll be able to choose the size of the escort, presence of air cover, and a variety of other variables.

Those who wish to undertake a long-term commitment to submarine service, lacking only the sleep- and sim-deprivation, can choose career mode. You'll chose a starting date, which affects the choices of technologies you'll be afforded. For instance, certain classes of submarine and certain types of equipment were not available until midway through the war.

There are also realism settings which run the usual gamut of unlimited weapons and dud torpedoes, to visibility and vulnerability. The higher the reality level, the higher the score in a mission.

LOCK TORPEDOS For a real challenge, try to operate the dead-accurate Target Data Computer during the heat of combat.

RADAR RIDERS Radar, introduced late in the war, lets you get a bearing on the enemy without sticking a periscope up for all to see.

DOS BOAT

SILENT HUNTER is a DOS game, although I had no problem running it from Windows 95's DOS prompt. The SVGA graphics are extremely well rendered. Zooming in with the periscope or binoculars affords a high level of detail on the enemy ships. As the weather turns nasty, the boat pitches more and speed is affected, although the seas themselves remain graphically flat, a disappointment after the rolling waves of ACES OF THE DEEP. Digitized voices give the correct replies to many common orders without adding any choppiness to the gameplay.

I did find one problem with the AI in SILENT HUNTER. While playing a warship encounter, I was shooting at a battleship with three destroyers escorting. After launching all weapons and going deep, I figured the destroyers would be all over me. After a long wait, the destroyers were still on their merry way, despite the fact that I had just attacked the battleship. After being snubbed by the destroyers, I surfaced for a look around.

After a little experimentation, I found that the destroyers would only fire their guns at me, and only when within a certain range. When I circled the convoy, just out of gun range, nobody would break formation and give chase. I purposely stayed on the surface, firing the deck gun, and considering throwing rocks. However, in other missions the AI was dead-on.

My final criticism is not of the actual game, but of the historical information therein. There are a number of interviews, but they're all of "Bud" Gruner. While I sincerely respect Mr. Gruner wholeheartedly as the hero he truly is, there are a lot of other stories to be told about the submarine war, and more than enough storytellers are still with us. The submarine fleet of World War II was staffed by many brave men, and I would have enjoyed hearing some of their firsthand accounts of the war. They will not be here forever.

The submarines that are still on patrol deserve a mention as well. As Dynamix and ACES OF THE DEEP did for the U-boat, I was hoping for more of the same from SSI. The US submarine force has paid particular attention to keeping its history intact. There are many submarine museums and archives, as well as oral historians and organizations like the SubVets of WW II. The resources are there, and I would have enjoyed seeing more of this type of information available in the game.

That said, this game is well crafted, with superb simulation of the sub's equipment and posts. It's my hope that those who play the game and find it entertaining will seek out more information on the submarine force of WW II. The more you learn, the more amazed you will be at their exploits, and it will add a whole new dimension to your computer gaming.

And maybe next Memorial Day you'll remember those that are "still on patrol."

APPEAL: ACES OF THE DEEP fans ready to play the good guy.

PROS: Dead-on simulations of sub systems and TDC, beautifully rendered SVGA graphics, a variety of exciting missions, and numerous difficulty levels.

CONS: Occasional failures in enemy artificial intelligence; historical background could be richer. Game can't be saved during a mission.

CG RATED

Unraveling The Mystery Is Just The Beginning.

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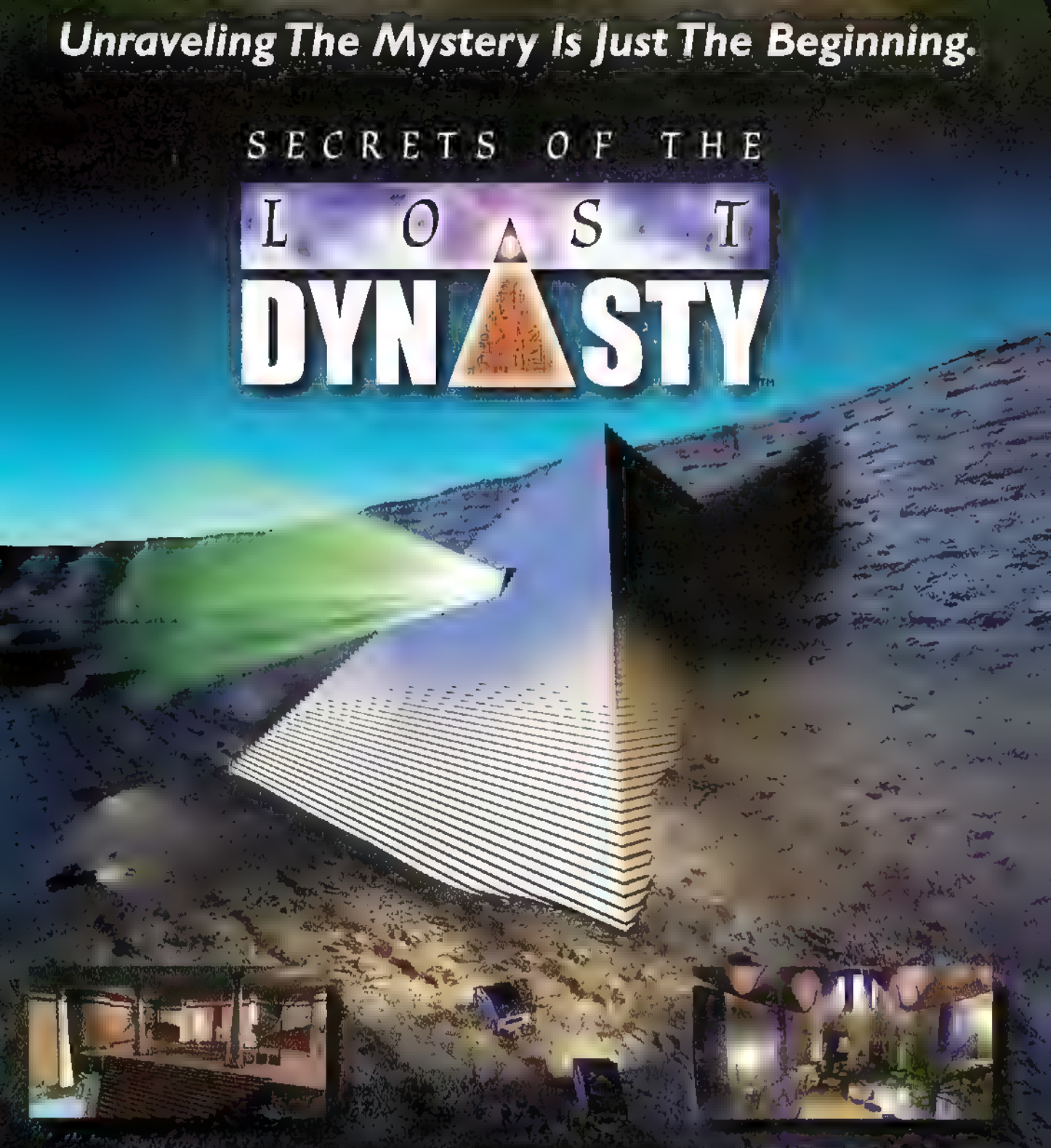

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NOVA SPRING

Circle Reader Service #179

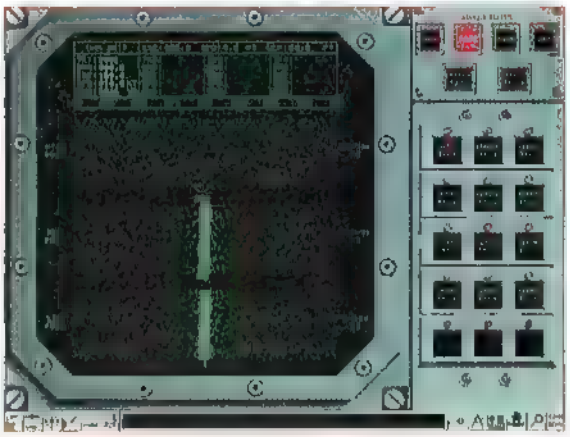
LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY: INTERMEDIATE

Crash Dive

Program Glitches And Time Limits Mar An Otherwise Immersive Sub Sim

by Kevin Turner

Fans of modern submarine warfare are probably getting *really* tired of playing RED STORM RISING, MicroProse's time-honored modern sub sim which recently celebrated its seventh birthday. But in all those years, no other sub simulation has managed to capture the atmosphere, feel, and tension of the Tom Clancy novel-based classic.



THAR BE WHALES At the Real level you'll need to master the sonar, and distinguish dangerous targets from singing mammals.

The developers at Software Sorcery are hoping that FAST ATTACK will be the first game to get a successful firing solution on the old MicroProse game. FAST ATTACK places you on the bridge of a Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine, tasked with defending American interests in a number of different theaters. Your orders will take you to the Persian Gulf, the Adriatic Sea, the Mediterranean, the Sea of Japan, and the frigid North Sea. Targets range from merchant shipping to enemy warships, as well as land-based targets that can be attacked using Tomahawk missiles.

Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486 or higher, 8 MB RAM (16 MB recommended), DOS 5.0 or higher or Windows 95, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM (4x recommended), mouse or joystick, supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Dynamix
Publisher: Sierra On-Line, Salinas, CA 93912 (800) 757-7707
Reader Service #: 345

REALITY CHECK

Having served on submarines and earned my membership in the "been there, done that" club, I can tell you that the FAST ATTACK design team did a good job researching their subject. The weapon parameters are basically on the money, the sonar looks exactly like the one on our old boat, and the geo plot looks, well, like a geo plot.

The best reality checks are the missions where you're tasked with tracking enemy target movements without attacking or being detected. This is truly the heart and soul of submarining. Following an enemy vessel all over creation is something submarines do on a daily basis, and something all submariners are familiar with. After playing one of these scenarios, I had the unbearable urge to wander around the house with a clipboard and take readings on household appliances.

The sonar display in FAST ATTACK looks a lot like a real waterfall display. As speed is increased, snow fills the sonar screen as a result of increasing noise. Biologics (noisy members of the aquatic animal kingdom) are even included here, so be sure that bogey you're chasing isn't emitting whalesongs. Your sub is equipped with two towed arrays which can be used to enhance sonar detection. The WLR-9 system is included, which is used to alert the crew to incoming weapons and active sonars.

FAST ATTACK's weapons systems include the Mark 48 torpedo, the Harpoon missile, and the Tomahawk cruise missile. The Mark 48 is a wire-guided torpedo that will swim out to a determined range and then hunt for enemy vessels. As long as the 15-mile-long wire is still intact, the weapon can be manually guided after the target drops countermeasures. Unfortunately, FAST ATTACK's torpedos aren't as smart or controllable as they should be.

The Harpoon is an anti-ship missile, and an excellent stand-off "fire-and-forget" weapon. This missile will fly to a programmed position and start looking for something to hit.

The Tomahawk is a cruise missile with a lot of punch. It's fired from vertical launch tubes that cannot be reloaded. As I'm sure you saw on CNN during Desert Storm, Tomahawks have great range and destructive capacity against land-based targets. The Tomahawk can also be used against shipping, although targeting is more critical, and is made doubly difficult by satellite uplink requirements.

FLOW CONTROL

Missions follow a realistic attack flow. First there's the detection phase, where targets are located and classified. Next comes target resolution, where the target's "solution" is plotted and the submarine maneuvers into weapon firing parameters. After that follows the attack phase, where the submarine launches its weapons on the refined target solution. Repeat as necessary until target is destroyed.

Finally, there's the extraction phase, also known as the "vacate the area before someone does unto us" phase.

After choosing game options (the game isn't overly demanding, but if you have a shower machine you may want to turn off

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PC CD-ROM

Circle Reader Service #156

DEPTH OF PLAY You'll control depth and direction from this screen; quirky controls make evading incoming weapons a real challenge.

voices and animation), you'll choose whether to play a training mission, a battle set, or start a career.

The training missions are challenging, and I heartily recommend that players start here. FAST ATTACK has a definite learning curve, and this curve can be climbed much faster if you follow the tutorial in the manual. There's a flow to successfully prosecuting a target, and it's important to learn this flow early in your career.

"Battle Sets" are like being dropped into the middle of a war zone. Each set has a number of missions, and if you're too chronologically challenged to commit to a virtual career, you'll enjoy these little journeys into some of the world's most infamous hotspots.

The Career option places you in command of the *USS Pittsburgh*. The success and failure of your crew rides entirely on your shoulders as the boat transits from one hotspot to another. There are promotions and medals to be earned, as well as explanations to be made to Congress if you fail. It is here that the full measure of the game is pursued.

Three difficulty levels are available. Easy level places sonar, fire control, and weapon reloading in the hands of the computer. Standard starts you with an approximate fire control solution, which you must refine. The Real level gives you full control of every facet of the game. Successfully completing a career in Real mode is quite an accomplishment.

PLAY TIME

My biggest complaint with this game is its interface. Like almost every other sub game, FAST ATTACK presents you with a picture of a control room where different control stations are reached by clicking on the station's representative figure or graphic. On real subs, radio, sonar, and ESM (Electronic Support Measures) each are located in their own rooms. A button bar allows you to quickly jump to various stations.

Although sub warfare doesn't take place at the speeds of air combat, you'll still find that the number of tasks you have to complete in a short time, especially during torpedo evasion or multiple target situations, can get your adrenalin flowing. Along with time compression, FAST ATTACK features "time expansion," so you can slow down the game when you're trying to do four things at once. Unfortunately, you're stuck with a time limit (usually two hours) on each mission that can't be turned off. There's nothing more annoying than being snatched from the jaws of victory by an artificially mandated time limit.

CRASH DIVE

Although the box lists this as a "Windows 95 & DOS" game, it's actually a DOS program that's been set up to install and run under Win 95 using the AutoPlay CD feature. Unfortunately, game stability under Win 95 isn't as good as it should be, and even some DOS users have experienced crashes and lock-ups. FAST ATTACK doesn't play well with 32 bit sound cards; if your system has a Soundblaster AWE32, select the Soundblaster 16 during setup. A patch disk is on the way, but the ability to save during missions would have been nice for those without the patch who experience lock-ups.

BRIDGE GAME FAST ATTACK joins its predecessors in trying to simplify gameplay but putting all the vital stations, unrealistically, on the bridge.

Playing FAST ATTACK is, for me, like a blast from the past. The realism is there in most respects, and the missions are compelling. The game emphasizes strategy and technique, and will entertain virtual submariners and those looking for a quality game in a different genre as well. Before you know it, you'll be taping your windows shut, eating dehydrated food, and drinking coffee like water. When you can draw the ventilation, electrical, and plumbing systems to your house by memory, you'll know you've arrived.

APPEAL: Sub sim fans tired of living in the past.

PROS: Nicely simulated detection systems, and a good variety of realistic missions.

CONS: Mission time limits should be optional or adjustable. Torpedo control and modeling is substandard. Crash bugs on some systems. Game can't be saved during a mission.

CG RATED ★★★

Playing FAST ATTACK at the Real level is challenging, since it forces you to do all the sonar listening, plotting, maneuvering, observing, and communicating. In reality, the closest simulation to actual submarining would be playing in Easy mode. Checking the information is important, but gathering and evaluating information is not the Officer of the Deck or Captain's job. Their job is to make decisions and maintain the big picture, not dial in a possible solution.

The actual tracking and prosecution of an enemy target takes a lot of people working together. The sonar team tracks the target and relays information to the tracking team. The diving officer and the helmsman/planesman handle the maneuvering. The chief of the watch compensates for trim and handles the bulk of communication. The fire control tracking team consists of a time-bearing plot, a geo plot, fire control, quartermasters (nav.gators), and time-range plot. The torpedo room loads the weapons and prepares them for either remote or local launch. Those not actually involved prepare for all possibilities. Information flow is the key to successful target prosecution. While everyone can be perfectly competent in their job, it is the team that accomplishes the mission.

CHRONICLES OF THE SWORD™

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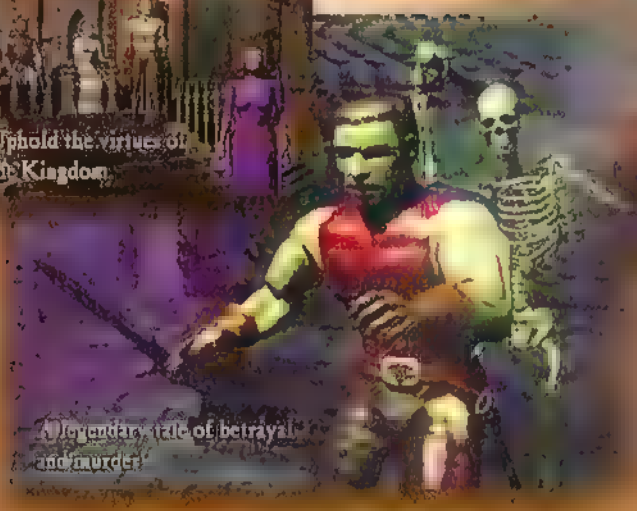

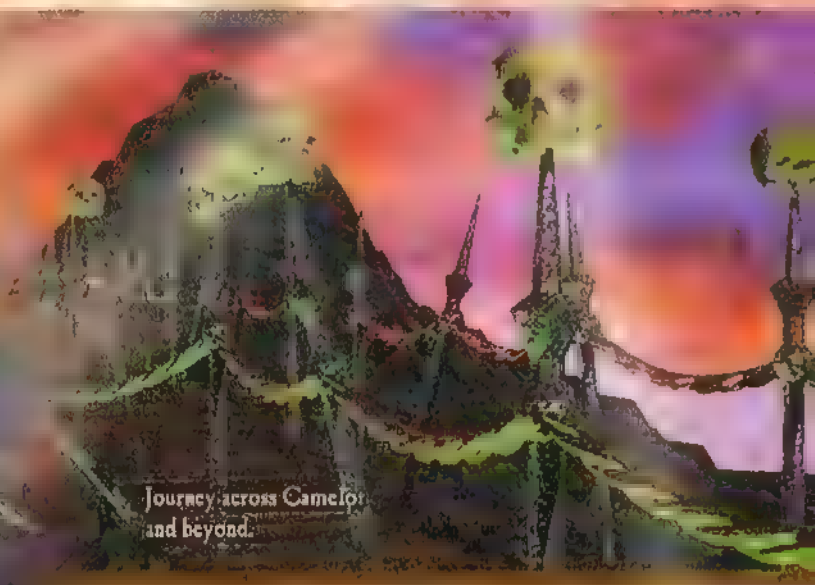

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PC CD ROM

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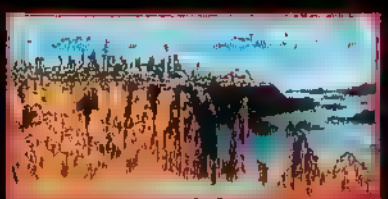

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– JERRY POURNELLE, BYTE MAGAZINE, 1996

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– PC GAMER, 1996

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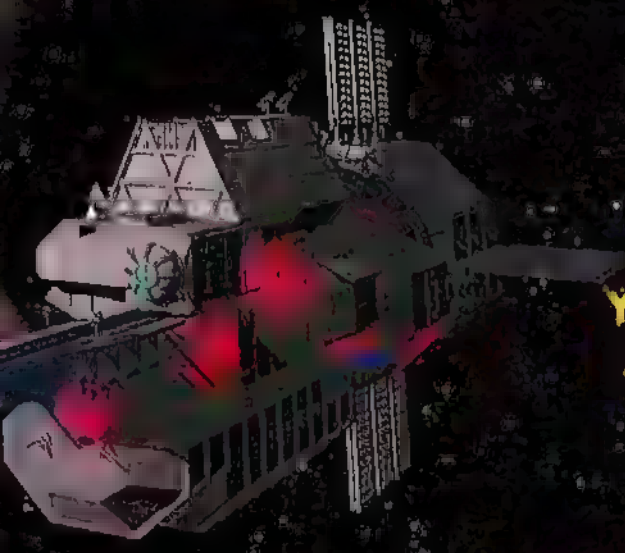
– COMPUTER GAME REVIEW, 1996



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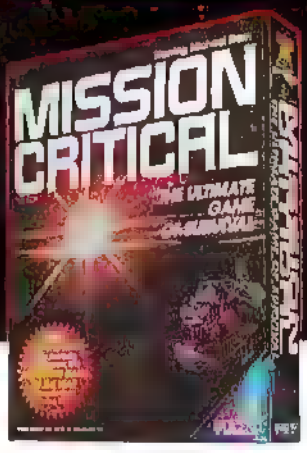

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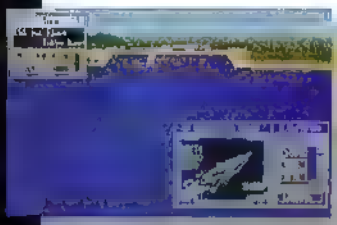

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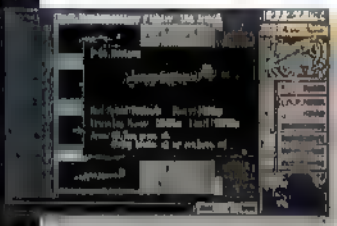

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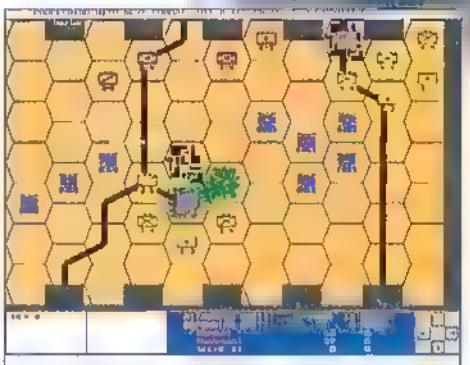
No More Boardgame Blues

HPS' upcoming AIDE DE CAMP 2.0 brings old favorites from your dusty shelves to your desktop

I confess, I'm an addict. Ever since I ordered my first SPI boxed game by mail over two decades ago, I've been hooked to board wargames. If you're like me, you never seem to be able to coordinate your fellow war/strategy gamers together for a night of cardboard counter-pushing. The new computer games offer an instant opponent, and sometimes even a decent AI. But admit it, you still miss the thrill of waging virtual wars over paper maps with your gaming buddies. You look longingly at those treasured boardgames, the likes of Lee, Alexander, and Napoleon collecting dust in their hexagons. Short of kidnapping your old friends and forcing them to play *War in Europe* (which some might consider cruel and unusual punishment), what can you do?

Fortunately, Scott Hamilton at HPS Simulations missed his old board wargames, too, and designed AIDE DE CAMP—a marvelous tool for taking old games and transferring them to the computer. AIDE DE CAMP allows you to play games that, quite frankly, aren't ever likely to be designed for our current market. To give one example, one of my favorite games of the past few years is *Cortes* from XTR, published in *Command* magazine. Through AIDE DE CAMP, I was able to play as the Aztecs for the first time in years, via e-mail.



NO CARDBOARD ALLOWED A game of *Napoleon At Waterloo* in progress, with combat units highlighted and dice ready to roll!

Converting your old favorites requires some work on your part, though. To give you an example, of the more than 400 board wargames I own, perhaps 10 percent are currently available in AIDE DE CAMP format. If your favorite board games aren't available in ADC, this leaves you the following choices.

▸ You can use the detailed editor in AIDE DE CAMP to create the counter sets and maps for the game you want to play. This takes some time and considerable

BRIEFINGS

▸ If you are enjoying CIVILIZATION II (see review in this issue), you'd better hope that the improved AI remains challenging for a while: the recent shake-up at MicroProse has left the shipping date for the multiplayer network and modem add-on module up in the air. There's no telling when (or if) this add-on be released at this point.

▸ In what has to be one of the most surprising maneuvers of the year in strategy games, the original FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL team has been assigned to develop OUTPOST II for Sierra. Evidently, not one line of code from the original OUTPOST will be used for the sequel, and some of the "hard science" approach will be modified to result in hopefully, a better game (you won't have to worry about keeping up with the oxygen/nitrogen mixture of the breathable air in every single building now, for instance).

▸ It looks as though SUPERHEROES (working title) from MicroProse/Simtex will be released late this summer rather than earlier. A lot of time is going

BRIEFINGS

into legal matters, mostly involving trademarking and copyrighting all of the superhero characters used in the game.

▶ Avalon Hill is still going strong, despite recent rumors to the contrary. On the boardgame side, *Hannibal: Rome vs. Carthage* takes the popular (and fast-playing) *We the People* system to the ancient world, while *London is Burning* is the first solitaire boardgame on the Battle of Britain since RAF was released a decade ago. On the computer front, HISTORY OF THE WORLD is shaping up nicely–this looks to be a natural for friendly multiplayer back-stabbing fare. Those looking for more serious historical gaming will be happy to know that WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN has finaly shipped, and should be available by around the time you read this.

▶ With Games Designer's Workshop having filed for bankruptcy, you'd expect that some major computer publisher would snap up the rights to translate all those award-winning boardgames to the computer. It seems, however, that when GDW needed cash in the mid-eighties, they essentially signed away the computer rights to a small publisher (who prefers to stay anonymous) who evidently is in no rush to publish at the present time. So, don't plan on seeing *A House Divided* on your laptop any time soon.

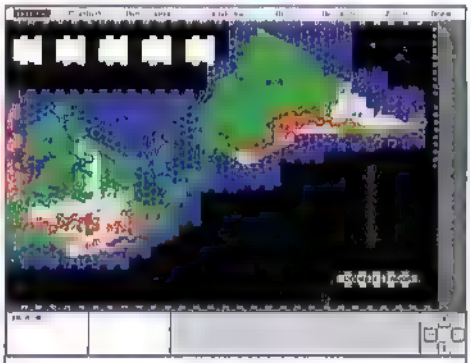
effort, but the results are worth it

▶ You can trade sets you've designed with those of your friends' design. This isn't a copyright violation, as long as you own the board games.

▶ You can purchase official sets directly from HPS or the boardgame companies for a nominal fee (usually around $10).

Of course, you also have to own the boardgame in order to play the computerized version. You see, AIDE DE CAMP doesn't provide an AI, nor does it regulate movement or compute combat for you. It does roll dice (one or two of the six-sided variety), and it allows you to designate entry/exit hexes for reinforcements, keeps up with the turn number, and so forth. But it really *is* like playing a boardgame, which may be too much work for those used to playing, say the WORLD AT WAR computer game series from Avalon Hill.

The interface is somewhat awkward until you get used to it as well. Trying to move units and not violate rules (moving into impassible hexes, for example) while designating combat and figuring odds can be a pain. But take one look at the accompanying screen shots, and you'll see that the effort is well worth it, as many of those boardgame designs are at least as creative as anything being done for the computer game market.



WHO NEEDS PAPER MAPS? The current version of AIDE DE CAMP is still robust enough to let you create maps for SPI's *Conquistador* and GMT's new *3 Days of Gettysburg*–with a little practice

"TIME TO REFIT THOSE OLD UNITS."

Those who hesitate to take the plunge back into boardgaming–however assisted by computer–may find themselves swayed by HPS' new version of AIDE DE CAMP 2.0, which removes a lot of the tedium and adds several new features:

▶ You may now designate hidden units, with automatic detection routines.

▶ The on-screen line-of-sight algorithms are taken from HPS' very realistic PANTHERS IN THE SHADOWS computer game.

▶ The program uses high memory, allowing you to create units, symbols, terrain, etc, without the limits imposed by the original AIDE DE CAMP.

▶ You may now designate the top to bottom units in a stack–very important for tactical games.

▶ Units may "flip" to show the back, or reduced, state of a unit.

▶ For those who like the old Avalon Hill style of using letter designations rather than numbers, this is now an option.

▶ It's still limited to a 16-color palette, but you will finally be given some control in setting up to half of those colors before creating your units and maps.

▶ You will be able to rotate units 90 degrees–a must for games with facing.

Best of all, AIDE DE CAMP 2.0 will be Windows 95, making it much easier to use. The due date for AIDE DE CAMP 2.0 is mid-summer, with HPS offering upgrades from the original AIDE DE CAMP for a minimal fee. If you can't wait, check out the demo of the original AIDE DE CAMP on our website at http://www.zd.com/gamstg. And blow the dust off that copy of *Napoleon's Last Battles*–there's a would-be Wellington out there waiting for your e-mail maneuver!

CG TIPS!

▶ HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC–To view the entire map, type "101495" or " ten fourteen ninetyfive"

▶ FANTASY GENERAL–If you over-research in a particular area–say, you research up to grade-4 light cavalry while you are at grade zero or one in every other unit category–the AI's "Specialization defense" kicks in. The end result is that all enemy Shadowlord units for that scenario get greater experience, and the computer opponent also gets extra gold to spend. The evil one has spies everywhere, so don't try to sneak in grade-5 units by the third continent, or you'll face nothing but crack enemy troops. The easy way to avoid this problem is simply to have a more balanced force/research mix. Many players new to FANTASY GENERAL make the mistake of assuming that all of their core units have to be preserved as they would be in PANZER GENERAL. Remember, this is a fantasy game; it's meant to be bloody. Never pass on the chance to buy a couple of low-grade units, especially Slingers–they're great for harassing an enemy, just as they were used historically in medieval warfare (or in epic battles of fantasy literature, if you prefer) –*Terry Coleman*

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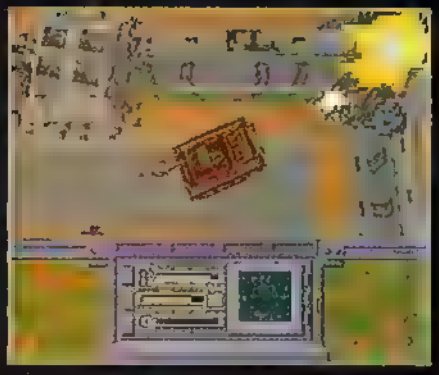

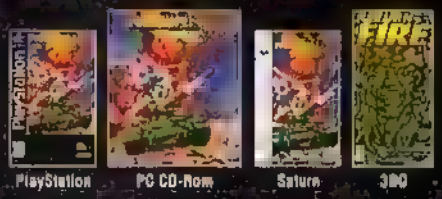

For Tips and Hints, dial 1-(900)-Par Trip
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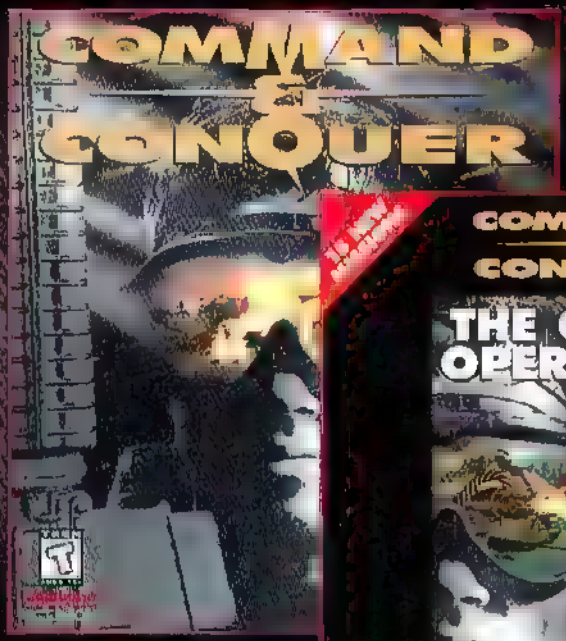

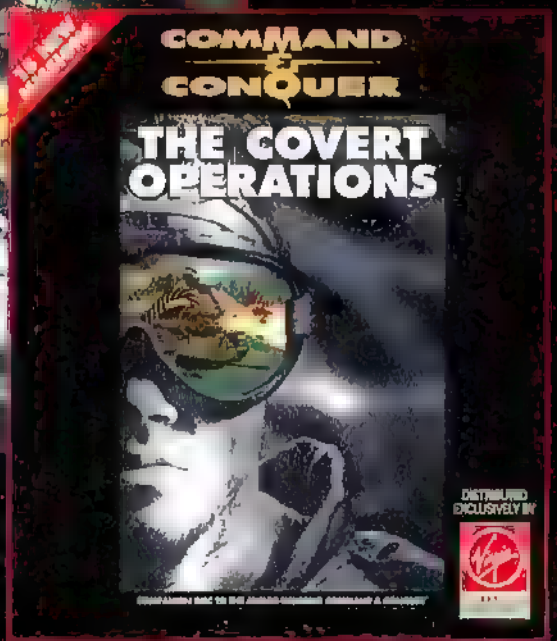

1995 GAME OF THE YEAR - *Computer Game Review*
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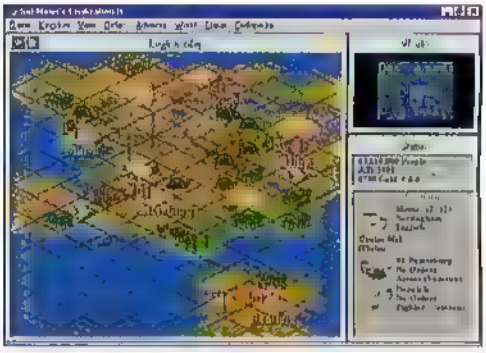
SKILL LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

CG CHOICE

A New Civilization

Our Prayers Have Been Answered

by Tim Carter



CIV CUBED Not only is CIVILIZATION II bigger and better, it also boasts a much-needed update to combat, new units, new technologies and more sophisticated economic and diplomacy models.

"Alexander looked over his domain and wept, for there were no more worlds to conquer."

Alexander's dilemma is a familiar problem for megalomaniacs, from the ancient Greeks to the fictional Ming the Merciless. Fortunately for us mortals, games like CIVILIZATION provided an unlimited number of worlds, and almost equally limitless ways to conquer them. But from day one, we've begged for a Civ sequel.

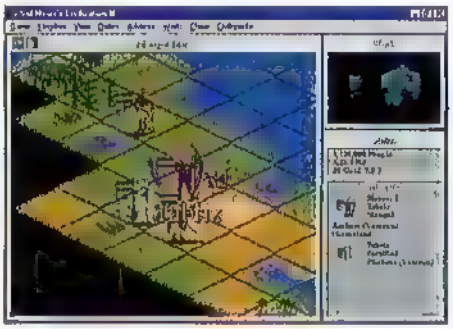
Trouble is, strategy game sequels haven't been very successful of late. X-COM: TERROR FROM THE DEEP and ALLIED GENERAL, for example, both failed to meet gamers' expectations of a sequel: build on the strengths of the original with a genuinely new experience.

ONE SMALL STEP FOR CIV...

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION II (Civ II) marks a radical departure from this trend, and could serve as a case study for how to make a great sequel. The designers tweaked virtually all of the major aspects of the game, adding considerable play value and subtlety without altering the basic playing experience that made CIVILIZATION so popular in the first place. The pace of gameplay, the balance between military, technological, and economic development, and the all-important race with other civilizations have been preserved. In fact, many of the changes add depth and dimension to the game, and the designers appear to have thought carefully about how each change would affect gameplay.

Visually, Civ II is a vast step forward from the original CIVILIZATION. While the new graphics, sound and multimedia clips are welcome, they are peripheral to the actual game, so I won't waste your time describing them.

The interface has also been improved, primarily by providing access to additional information at crucial points in the game. For instance, when choosing your next research project, a help button will take you to the civilopedia, where you can examine each technology. A goal button allows you to see which of the available technologies are prerequisites for key discoveries—like railroads—down the line.



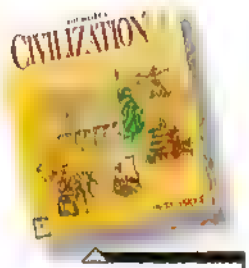
NEW DUDES Archers and Explorers are two of many new units; Archers have good attack and defense ratings, while Explorers have enhanced movement.

...ONE GIANT LEAP FOR CIV-KIND

The most dramatic changes in Civ II are in the field of military conflict. In addition to a host of new units, most with specialized abilities, the basic combat system has been revised. Units are still rated for attack and defense, but they also have a firepower factor, reflecting the destructive potential of their technology, and hit points roughly corresponding to their durability. Damage from combat is carried over, and must be regenerated before the unit will be able to function properly. These changes not only make combat more realistic—no more riflemen defeated by phalanxes—they also change the overall role of combat in the game. Units, particularly high-value, expensive ones, must be used more carefully, lest they get worn out and die through attrition.

Overall, offensive operations are more difficult than in CIVILIZATION. Combined arms planning is now crucial, particularly in the endgame, when good defensive units are available and will likely be defending from behind fortified positions.

The AI has also improved considerably. While the computer still tends to attack from the same direction, it now uses units in combination much more often, and



Price: $48.99
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-33 or better, 8 MB RAM, SVGA Graphics, 2x CD-ROM drive, 11 MB hard drive space, mouse, supports most major sound cards
# of Players: 1
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Brian Reynolds
Publisher: MicroProse/Spectrum HoloByte
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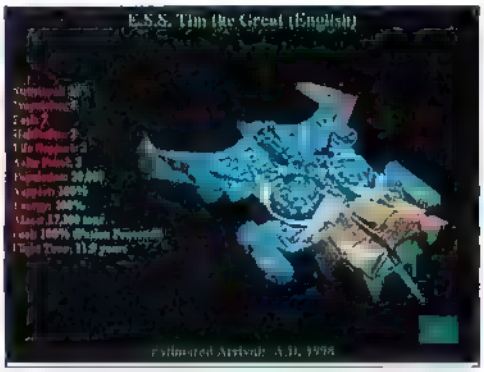

TO INFINITY AND BEYOND With a more competitive AI and more gameplay options, getting to the stars is significantly harder, even if you are "Tim the Great."

takes good advantage of its technology. Don't be surprised to see your cities hit by waves of bombers soon after your opponents learn how to make them.

The computer opponents are also quick to identify the predominant civilization in the game (usually yours) and gang up on it both militarily and diplomatically. More than once I had a substantial lead on all of my competitors at the 1750 AD mark, only to have them ally against me and spend the next 200 years coming after me with everything they had. Oh, and the designers have seen to it that the AI now uses nuclear weapons preemptively, better brush up on your diplomacy if you don't have SDI technology.

Fortunately, if the AI civs catch up, the computer alliance will likely fall apart, allowing for a more challenging race to space. This rather elementary form of play-balancing adds a huge amount of value, as most games will now go right down to the wire.

WAR AND PEACE

Diplomatic relations have also been expanded, as the computer now tracks your reputation. Stab your allies in the back and you may find few friends the next time you need help yourself. Along with a stronger defensive military system, reputation makes warmongering both more difficult and less rewarding, demanding a more balanced approach to expansion.

The designers have thoughtfully tweaked the economic system as well. In particular, new city improvements (harbors and offshore platforms) give coastal cities considerable economic power, especially in the long run. The changed economic system offers more rewards for careful city management and smart players will have settlers busy around their primary cities from the beginning.

Government properties have also changed. Fundamentalism is now available later in the game for fanatical expansionists, while Monarchy has been beefed up to encourage economic growth early on. Your type of government now also affects your ability to manipulate spending; only democratic governments have full control of the public purse, while less developed systems must work within predefined ranges.

In addition to new twists on old ideas, Civ II also includes a number of completely new features. Players now have more input into the characteristics of the randomly created maps, and may also custom design their own world from scratch. Several maps also come with the game, including smaller maps, such as Greece and the Mediterranean. More interestingly, cities and units may be added to custom maps, allowing for the creation of scenarios. Two come with the game (WW II and Ancient Rome) and others are already available on the internet.

Still, the real heart of CIVILIZATION II is the development of a balanced empire, consisting of a strong military and an equally strong focus on economic and diplomatic matters. This is where Civ II really excels. The challenge to the player is stronger than in CIVILIZATION, and the race to keep ahead tends to be competitive a lot longer than in the original.

Is this the perfect game? My version ran without a hitch, although to save time I shut down many of the ancillary graphics, which have reportedly caused some crashes. Patches continue to be churned out by MicroProse, so visit their web site at (http://www.microprose.com).

The biggest problem for me was the lack of a multiplayer engine of any kind, particularly given that CIVNET is already up and functioning. Also, it's too bad the computer can't just concede defeat when you've amassed an insurmountable lead, so you don't have to slog through hours of uncompetitive play just to see the victory screen.

Still, this is a minor quibble. On the whole, Civ II is a spectacularly addictive and time-consuming sequel worthy of its predecessor. I had to delete CIVILIZATION from my hard drive to fit this game on, and I suspect that Civ II will stay on my hard drive until (if) Civ III comes along.

Welcome To The War

Along with a new combat system, Civ II has many all-new units. Adding more unit types smoothes out the transition of your armed forces over time, provides interesting new capabilities, and generally makes military campaigns both more interesting and more challenging. Here are my favorite troops from each time period.

Ancient

Archers: a good multi-purpose unit

Elephants: expensive but pack a good punch

Pikemen: the perfect defense against roving horsemen

Crusaders: the heathen-basher's favorite weapon

Industrial Revolution

Dragoons: mobile horsemen

Cavalry: packs the biggest punch for mid-game units

Fanatics: Fundamentalist cannon fodder

Galleon: with frigate allows separation of fighting and transportation

Modern

Stealth: both bombers and fighters available, best units in the game

Paratroopers: can drop onto any square within range, including undefended enemy cities

Alpine: tough, mobile infantry

Cruise Missiles: one-shot expendable missile that packs a real punch, the perfect antidote to an aggressive computer AI.

AEGIS Cruiser: defense doubled against air and missile attacks, crucial for the endgame.

APPEAL: CIVILIZATION fans and megalomaniacs the world over *must* play this game.

PROS: Highly addictive, makes original Civ even better, scads of replay value, different enough to warrant buying.

CONS: No multiplayers mode; no way for computer to concede if you get way ahead early in the game.

CG RATED

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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

PanzerArmee Fantasy

The General's Back, Waving A Magic Wand

by Elliott Chin

You never really know about sequels. For every COMMAND & CONQUER or WARCRAFT II, others fail to meet our admittedly high expectations. PANZER GENERAL, for example, was such a great game, that trading our Panzers for Shermans in ALLIED GENERAL just didn't quite cut it. Well, that old cliché of "The third time's the charm" is particularly applicable here, as FANTASY GENERAL, the third of the GENERAL series from SSI, is the true sequel to PANZER GENERAL.

THE MAGIC IS BACK FANTASY GENERAL is truly every bit as good as PANZER GENERAL, with great AI, challenging scenarios a great interface, and fantastic units that look even better in close-up.

THE TRUE HEIR TO THE THRONE

FANTASY GENERAL takes you into the magical World of Aer, a once-peaceful land that has been conquered by the vile Shadowlord. You portray one of four heroes—the noble Knight Marshal Calis, the Warlord Lord Marcus, the Archmage Krell, or the beautiful Sorceress Mordra—chosen by the Council of Five to overthrow this tyrannical monarch.

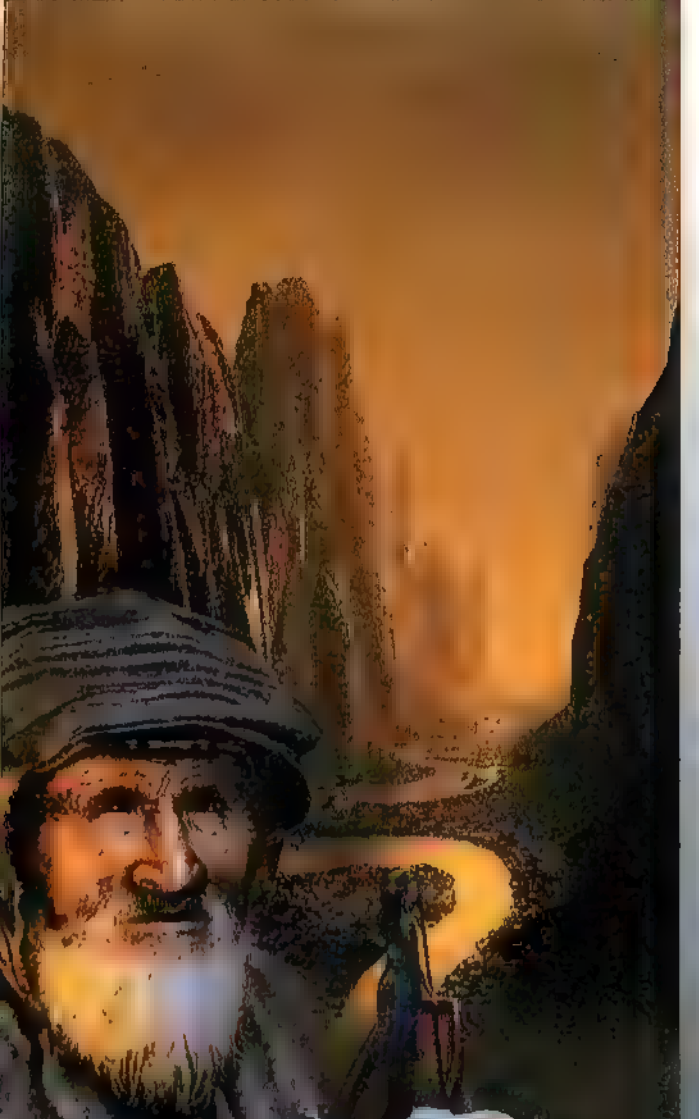
Like its illustrious predecessor, FG is a turn-based affair, where you wage a grand war against the computer, scenario by scenario. It's also the model for a perfect strategy game. It will appeal to hard-core wargamers with its incredibly tough AI and challenging scenarios. Light strategy gamers and newcomers to the genre will like its brisk pacing, reasonable learning curve and intuitive interface. Even fans of *Dungeons & Dragons* and Tolkien will find themselves entranced by the wonderful array of fantasy units: Werebears, Fire Beetles, Undead Cavalry, a half-dozen different types of Dragons. FG's core campaign provides well over 100 hours of gameplay, and there are also a handful of stand-alone scenarios to play, plus a Play-By-Email arena, where you can wage war against other human fantasy generals.

ROMMEL WOULD BE PROUD

One of the best qualities of FANTASY GENERAL is its pacing. Much like PANZER GENERAL, the FG campaign starts out nice and easy, but once you've gotten the hang of things, begins to pour on the challenges. In the first of five continents, Keldona, you only need to fight through three simple scenarios, with few enemy units, to defeat the ruling Orc King Dragga. It's a nice way of introducing newcomers to the game without overloading them with multiple units and strategies. You are in for a rude awakening in the second continent, however: the number of victory hexes increase dramatically, as do the quality of enemy troops and the aggressiveness of the computer opponent. FANTASY GENERAL has great AI, and it will go after your missile and siege units, concentrate on eliminating your weakened troops, and sneak behind your lines to take *your* starting hex. In short, the computer employs the very same tactics a smart human player would if it were in the computer's shoes.

The turn limits for each scenario force you to push quickly towards your objectives, increasing the tension. You learn pretty quickly to prioritize your strategies, plan your moves in advance and also to not spread your forces too thin. What the smart AI, turn limits, and setup of the scenarios do is challenge you to think and

Price: $54.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 386/40 or better, 8 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 2 x CD-ROM drive, 8 MB hard drive space, mouse, supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards.
# of Players: 1-2
Protection: None (CD must be in drive to play)
Designer: SSI Special Projects Group
Publisher: SSI
Sunnyvale, CA
(800) 601-7529
Reader Service #: 342



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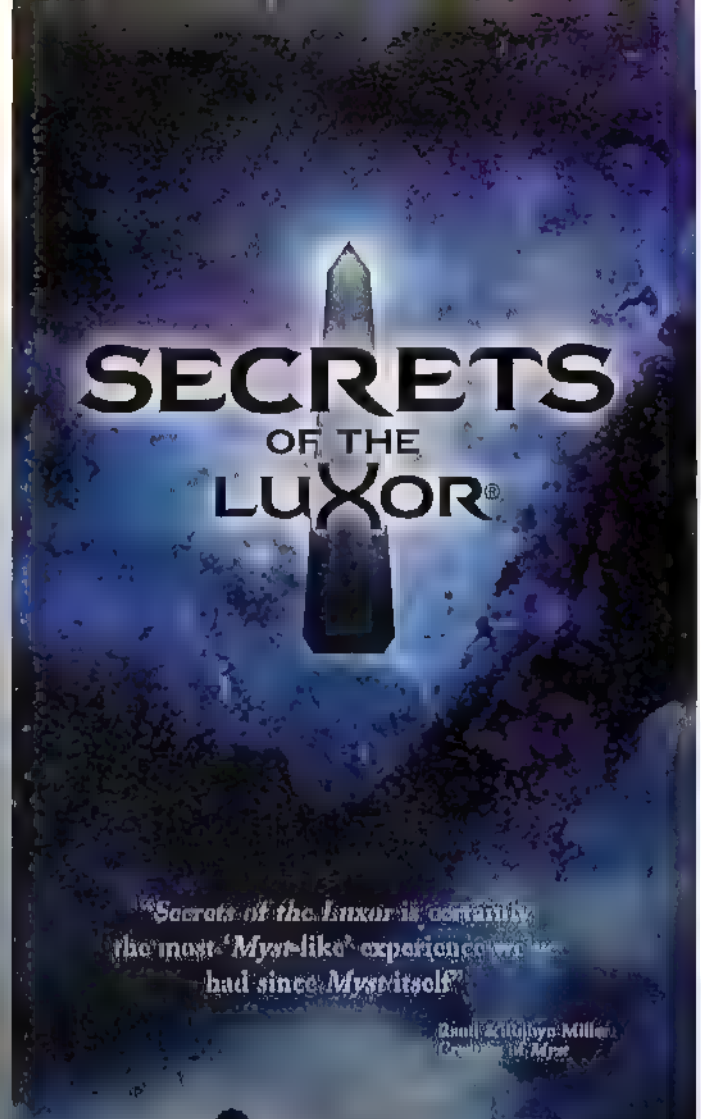

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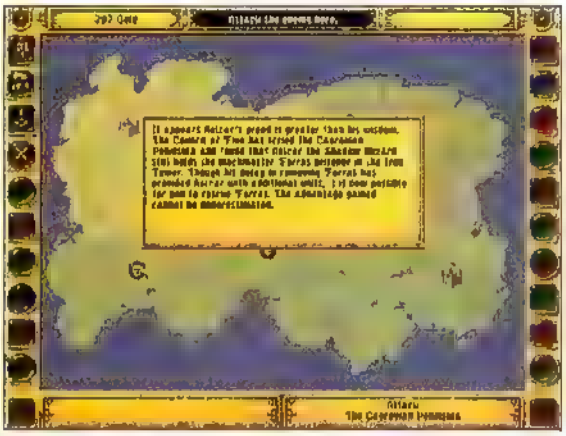

METAL LORD A key to winning the campaign is freeing the Mechmaster Ferras. Win the southern-most scenario here on the second continent, and Ferras will happily share with you the secrets of mech units.

plan intelligently, something other games, even good ones like COMMAND & CONQUER, don't do quite as well. And with each passing continent, the struggle only gets tougher.

So what else is great about this game? Try a treasure trove of units. They are divided into four races: mortal, magic, beast and mechanical, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. Within each race, there are ten classes of units, ranging from heavy infantry to spellcasters, and each class has up to five grades. When you begin the game, all classes are available to you, but you can only recruit the first grade troops. To upgrade these troops, you must first research these new unit types by assigning them a percentage of the gold you win after each scenario. After enough money and time, you soon get a pop-up window telling you the new upgrade has been discovered. With the four different races, ten classes and five grades, not to mention dozens of individual heroes and villains, FANTASY GENERAL provides a staggering 200+ units to play with. You can also add to this mix experience, when units gain from killing other units in combat. When they amass enough experience they gain a level (maximum five experience levels), and they are granted increased armor and attack ratings.

Just as you'd expect from a fantasy game, magic plays a part in the World of Aer. You have spellcaster units, which can cast one spell, though each grade knows a different spell. In addition, all heroes except for Marcas have some form of spellcasting, though it's static, meaning the heroes can never learn new ones. There are also a plethora of magic items, which are definite priorities if you want to survive to the last continent. Scattered about the continents, in shrine, temple and town hexes, they'll grant combat bonuses and spell effects.

RAW RECRUITS The units you recruit in the game's beginning are only the tip of the iceberg, as you gain more gold, you'll be able to research new and better units. Check out Terry Coleman's strategy column for some research tips.

Best of all, this game runs smoothly on very little overhead, so the glory of FANTASY GENERAL can be enjoyed by many. One thing to keep in mind: don't play FG in Windows 95 because it could crash. Other than that, it is a very clean program.

ALL IS NOT PERFECT

So FANTASY GENERAL has all the right pieces, but what is it missing? Hardly anything, although I do wish FG had a more robust magic system, especially considering its fantasy background. It almost seems as though magic is peripheral to the game, since spells are so few and far between. I would have liked a magic system more akin to HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC or MASTER OF MAGIC, where you could gain new spells and cast a variety of enchantments to heavily influence combat. Don't get me wrong; the magic in the game isn't bad, but I just wish it was more fleshed out.

The biggest nuisance, though, is the lack of scenario descriptions on the continent maps. When perusing the continental map to decide which of several scenarios to tackle, you don't know which path to choose because the only information you have on any of them is the name of the scenario location, like Scarlet Plain. It's colorful, but it doesn't tell you anything. Yes, once you click on a scenario, you get a description, but in FG, once you click on a scenario, you're committed to it. SSI should have allowed you to see the briefing *before* you commit to the scenario so that you could plot a strategy for traversing the continent, rather than just pointing randomly and clicking.

But these two faults are only minor details. As a whole, this game is easily the equal of its esteemed predecessor; and I even think the fantasy angle makes it more appealing. When you add up all the great features, like the AI, the number of units and scenarios, and the challenge; you get a game that is a near-perfect foray into the magical realm of strategy wargaming. PANZER GENERAL fans will be in wargaming heaven, and fantasy buffs will find a tactical wargame more addictive than anything Tolkien's old ring could ever muster.

APPEAL: Fantasy fans with a taste for warfare and PANZER GENERAL fans seeking the true sequel.

PROS: Tons of cool fantasy units, great AI, nearly endless replay value; a strategy game that will make your brain work overtime.

CONS: The straightforward, but simple magic system in FG may disappoint those expecting the depth of MASTER OF MAGIC's arcane lore. The lack of scenario descriptions is annoying as well.

CG RATED ★★★★★

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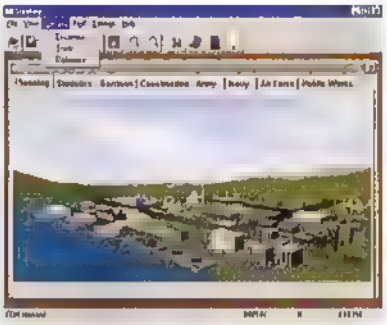

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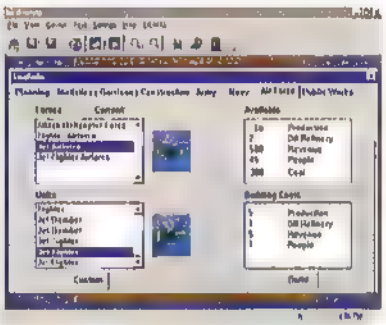

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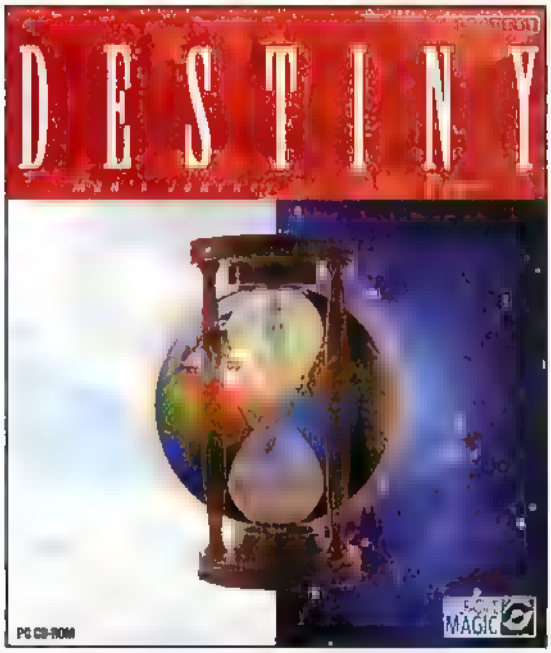

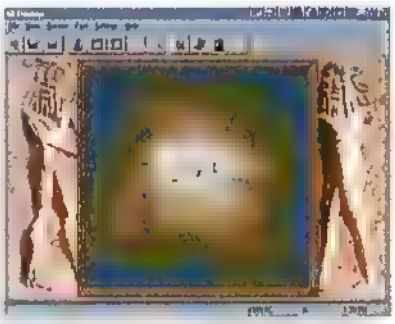

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Taking Off The Kid Gloves

C&C Returns With Some Punishing New Missions

by Martin E. Cirulis

"Please, Sir, can I have some more?"

Every time a computer game hits it big, the ghost of Oliver Twist stirs in the heart of each obsessed player. Sometimes we have to wait the better chunk of a year and then pay full price for a "whole new game" that isn't much more than the same old thing repackaged. Luckily for COMMAND & CONQUER fans, "mission" disks are coming back into fashion, and Westwood Studios is right on top of things, offering a sequel which delivers more of the game you like, both sooner and cheaper than a lame knock-off. While gamers wait hungrily for the next C&C "sequel" like RED ALERT, they can keep their skills up to speed with COVERT OPERATIONS, a CD containing 15 new missions for world-beaters and 10 new multi-player maps for friend-beaters. And even though there's nothing new under the green tiberium glow here, gamers not exhausted by point 'n' click warfare by now will find more than their dollar's worth in this add-on product.

MISSIONS IMPOSSIBLE COVERT OPERATIONS is a collection of 15 new, harder missions, with a tougher computer opponent, and some new multiplayer maps.

Price: $19.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-66 or better, 8 MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, 20 MB hard drive space, MCGA graphics, mouse; supports most major sound cards.
# of Players: 2 over modem, up to 4 over IPX network
Protection: None (requires original C&C to play, CD must be in drive)
Designer: Westwood Studios
Publisher: Virgin Interactive Irvine, CA (800) 874-4607
Reader Service #: 343

THE WAR CONTINUES...

COVERT OPS is a "mission" disk, as Westwood puts it, not an expansion disk. This is because technically, there isn't any expansion of the C&C universe going on here. The 15 new missions offered, seven GDI and eight NOD, have no new units or buildings — although NOD players can now use the gunships and chem troopers found only in the multiplayer arena of the original game. Neither is there any continuation of the good storyline from C&C. These missions represent unconnected battles and can be played in any order; just select one to play from the list of 15. The briefings are framed with animations revealed from the original game as well.

As for the actual missions themselves, they are as tough as they can be without being ridiculous puzzles; and most of them do not hinge on a single "trick" for success. Of the 15 missions, most are base-versus-base struggles, while the rest are those tricky "quest" missions where you are given a limited number of units to accomplish a very specific task.

The computer opponents are not much smarter than in C&C, but they do have a couple of new and nasty tricks. The biggest change is that the computer attacks in force much earlier in a mission, making the survival of your fledgling base much more difficult. Whereas before a player in the early stages of building his base could count on only having to defend against jeeps, a few troops and the odd tank, now you can count on seeing multiple tanks backed by artillery almost

THE BEST DEFENSE... Anybody planning on playing the COVERT OPS missions had better bone up on their base defense skills first, or suffer appropriately.

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Getting Airborne

To help keep frustration at bay as you leap into these self-proclaimed "hyper-hard" missions, here are some tips and insights into the first mission for either side. In general, players should defend their bases in a full 360 degrees in order to stave off sneak attacks. even having your back against a cliff isn't enough anymore. Wise commanders will sprinkle mini-gunners throughout their bases. Also, given the intense money requirements of sophisticated defenses, players should build a second harvester as quickly as possible, the investment will pay off quickly.

Those with access to *CGW* back-issues or the Internet, would also do well to check out the first C&C strategy guide in our February issue and the second part on our Web site, as lessons learned there are doubly-important in Covert Ops where any advantage is as good as oxygen.

CG ON-LINE

GDI Mission 1—Blackout

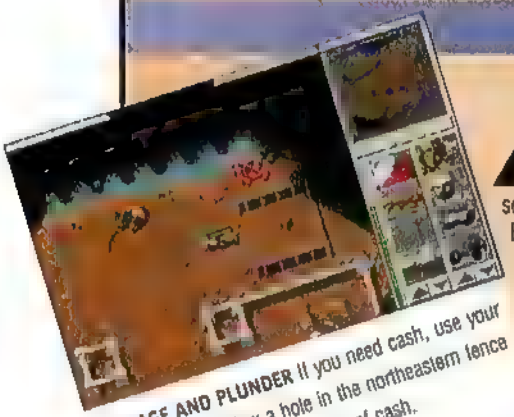
Following the road to the NOD powerplants is pretty easy for your pair of commandos, just be careful to watch out for the angry NOD troopers who will emerge from the wreckage. Once you destroy the powerplants and deprive the deadly NOD Obelisks of power, your construction vehicle will appear. Drive it around to set up shop just north of the NOD installation you just demolished. While you go through the initial base setup, you must quickly send your commandos to blow-up the Obelisks SW of your base and their guard turrets before the NOD commander rebuilds enough power plants to get them back on line and ruin your whole day.

After this, build a trio of BazookaMen to take out the cliffside turrets that your commandos cannot reach. Without this maneuver your precious harvester will get shot up as soon as it begins to wander east. As I've mentioned, defense is your biggest construction priority, and you will come to rely heavily on the Guard Tower/Advanced Guard Tower combo to buy you enough time to build the Advanced Communication array and defend your base. If you can beat back the nearly constant NOD attacks you can then use your basic skills to crack the very hard NOD base to your North. It won't be too difficult, just long.

CAPTAIN COMMANDO Use your two commandos to eliminate the plants that power the NOD Obelisks, and then build your base here, north of that site.

NOD Mission #1—Bad Neighborhood

A pretty basic base fight here, but daring commanders will ignore the first Tiberium patch they see (as it dries out very quickly and is a far drive from the bigger patches), and drive their construction vehicle NE just south of a bridge that links to rich Tiberium fields. (Be careful not to stray west initially, as there is a GDI Mammoth lurking in the shadows.) If you set up here block the small gap between cliffs directly to the NE and watch the GDI harvesters burn. Back it up with a Laser Tower as quickly as possible. If you are short on cash and have a couple of rocket bikes sitting around, drive them to the upper NE corner of the board behind the NOD base and blast a hole in the fence you find there. One bike should survive long enough to get through and grab the cash crate waiting there



PILLAGE AND PLUNDER If you need cash, use your rocket bikes to blow a hole in the northeastern fence and then enter to grab a stash of cash.

before your first foundation dries. The computer is now very fond of dropping off engineers behind your base by chopper, and you can count on this air-dropped gift at least twice a battle.

The only drawback I found to these new tough missions was that most of the fun came in the early stages. The trick is to survive long enough to establish your defenses; once that is done, you basically have an hour-and-a-half exercise in attrition and base-busting.

DECLASSIFIED OBSERVATIONS

The real question with any add-on disk has got to be, "Is there enough here to merit investing even more money into this game?" I think the answer for Command & Conquer fans is a definite yes. Along with the missions, you get 10 new multiplayer maps, giving the game longer legs for us social-gaming types, although it's unfortunate that computer players in multi-player games still refuse to build bases, a flaw I was hoping this disk might correct. The final benefit to gamers is that this disk comes with the latest, debugged version of the C&C program, and what was a pretty smooth game now runs even smoother.

The lack of anything really new here as far as gameplay means Covert Ops is definitely in the quick fix category, so if you just gotta have more C&C, then step up and thank Westwood for giving it to you at a fair price while they work on really expanding things.

▶APPEAL: Command & Conquer nuts itching for more missions and multiplayer maps will definitely want to play Covert Ops.

▶PROS: New missions worth 40+ hours to the average gamer, with scenarios that are challenging without being "puzzles."

▶CONS: Gamers looking for anything new will have to wait. Pretty much reserved for those who can't get enough of a good thing.

CG RATED ★★★★

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Fred Ford and Paul Reiche III, *Designers – Star Control and Star Control II*

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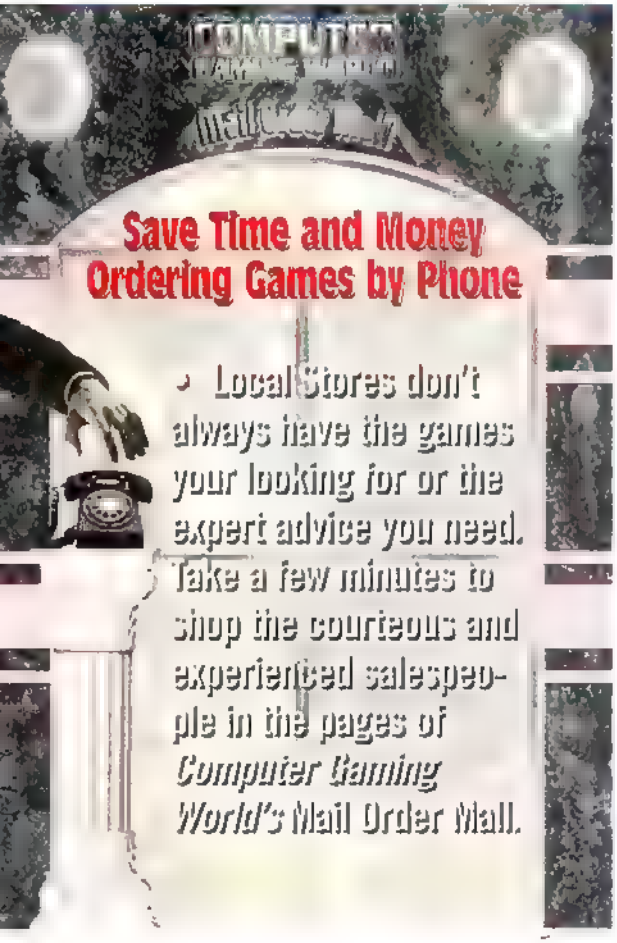

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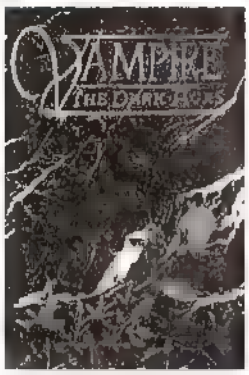

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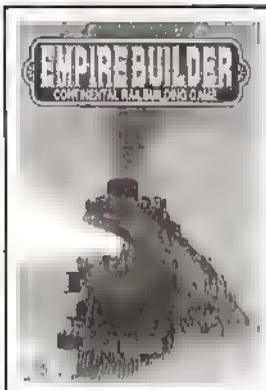

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Mystery Word Grid

	H				
		E			
P	I	N	C	H	W
	R				
S					

MYSTERY WORD

WORD LIST and LETTER CODE chart

PINCH .....W	PRESS.....K	BLAST .....A	WRECK .....D
BREAK .....Z	PUNCH .....S	SPRAY C	TURBO V
STOMP .....T	STAND.....R	PRESS.....E	DREAM ....O
CRUSH.....I	SCORE .....H	SLANT L	CHASE.....P

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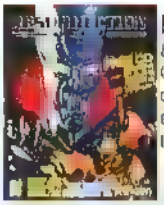

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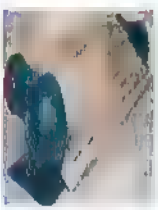

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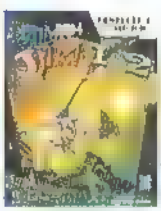

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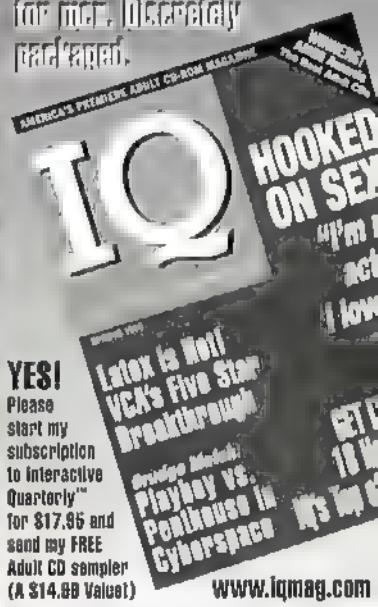

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Deep Throat	$29
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'GLAMOUR GIRLS 2' 10 of the most beautiful women with firm, tight bodies, exposing themselves to you, on this amazing CD. Over 40 erotic videos of girls ready and waiting to reveal their luscious bodies for your eyes only. **CD $24**

'ROMSOFT 3 PAK' Captured Elegance, Penetration and She's So Sleazy combine to make this 3 pak HOT, HOT, HOT! **3 CD's $29**

'ROMSOFT 6 PACK 2' Babe Patrol, Hot Dog Girls of Florida, Luscious Ladies in Lingerie, Extasy Suites, Striptease and A Shot in the Pink are what you'll get in this sexy 6 pack! **6 CD'S $39**

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CGW096A1

HALL OF FAME

Welcome to the Cooperstown of Computer Games. Here, raised upon pedestals, you'll find the games that broke the records, established the benchmarks, and held gamers in delighted trances for hours untold.

Highlights

WING COMMANDER
Origin, 1990

The original WING COMMANDER had little pretense of being a "space simulation." Action lovers, though, could have hardly asked for a more streamlined space shoot-'em-up than Chris Roberts' original design in the series. While any attempt at a flight model in space would have been ridiculed, the game's engine pushed the hardware of the time by offering smoother performance than many more realistic polygon-filled flight sims. When you threw in the beautifully rendered bitmap overlays–at the time beyond anything else on the market–the game's visceral appeal was enough to win over even the most die-hard simulation addicts.

And what action! The WC universe was fast-paced, and so internally consistent that it allowed you to shoot anything–even your fellow pilots or your mother ship! The now-familiar "branching plot tree" was introduced here by Origin, adding depth and elements of adventure to the intense joystick action of the combat sequences. The "hot washup" scenes, winding down in the bar of the Carrier *Tiger's Claw*, discussing Kilrathi tactics and the progress of the war, seem corny now. But at the time of the game's release, they offered a welcome respite between frantic missions, and did a good job of portraying your shipmates as something other than AI loops.

As the production values rise with each new WING COMMANDER release, it would be easy to dismiss the original as outdated. Quaint though it might seem to those weaned on fast 486s, however, WING COMMANDER is still a model of how to take a vision and develop it into a virtually seamless and purely enjoyable game. Would that more high-tech games today could remember that simple approach.

WING COMMANDER II
Origin, 1991

How do you follow one of the most successful computer games of all time? If you're Origin, you do it with a high-powered sequel that manages to surpass the original. Chris Roberts' dream had always been to bring intense dogfighting space sequences of his favorite sci-fi movies to the computer screen. And while Roberts' cinematic aspirations wouldn't reach fruition until WING COMMANDERS III and IV, the seeds were definitely sown in WING COMMANDER II.

The strong script found Origin's writers at their peak. The characters are more well rounded than those of WC I: Spirit's calm demeanor and acceptance of duty, for example, actually make you believe in her "warrior's code" of honor. Other supporting characters are by turns arrogant, demanding, confused, even vulnerable. It wasn't *Faust*, but the story was darker and deeper than before, adding to the sense of grand galactic battle–especially since we were able to glimpse the Kilrathi behind the-scenes, and find out that they were as quirky, insecure and arrogant as the spacefaring humans. Although it is rare to find sequels in our Hall of Fame, WING COMMANDER II deserves the honor, if only because it did everything the original did, with a more confident touch. The wrist-wracking action of the original was even more wrist-wracking. The enemy pilots were improved (but still somewhat predictable compared to modern sims). The sound effects were so well done that they inspired many gamers to try their first sound card; arguably, this is the "killer application" that helped to put Sound Blaster on the map.

Inductees Prior To 1989

- BATTLE CHESS (Interplay Productions, 1988)
- CHESSMASTER (The Software Toolworks, 1986)
- DUNGEON MASTER (FTL Software, 1987)
- EARL WEAVER BASEBALL (Electronic Arts, 1986)
- EMPIRE (Interstel, 1978)
- F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER (MicroProse, 1988)
- GETTYSBURG: THE TURNING POINT (SSI, 1986)
- KAMPFGRUPPE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
- MECH BRIGADE (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
- MIGHT & MAGIC (New World Computing, 1986)
- M.U.L.E. (Electronic Arts, 1983)
- PIRATES (MicroProse, 1987)
- SIMCITY (Maxis, 1987)
- STARFLIGHT (Electronic Arts, 1986)
- THE BARD'S TALE (Electronic Arts, 1985)
- ULTIMA III (Origin Systems, 1983)
- ULTIMA IV (Origin Systems, 1985)
- WAR IN RUSSIA (Strategic Simulations, 1984)
- WASTELAND (Interplay Productions, 1986)
- WIZARDRY (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)
- ZORK (Infocom, 1981)

Modern Inductees

- ALONE IN THE DARK (I-Motion, 1992)
- BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR (Dynamix, 1993)
- DAY OF THE TENTACLE (Dynamix, 1993)
- DOOM (Id Software, 1993)
- FALCON 3.0 (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)
- FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO (Dynamix, 1993)
- GUNSHIP (MicroProse, 1989)
- HARPOON (Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)
- KING'S QUEST V (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
- LEMMINGS (Psygnosis, 1991)
- LINKS 386 PRO (Access Software, 1992)
- M-1 TANK PLATOON (MicroProse, 1989)
- MASTER OF ORION (MicroProse, 1993)
- RAILROAD TYCOON (MicroProse, 1990)
- RED BARON (Dynamix, 1990)
- SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION (MicroProse, 1991)
- THEIR FINEST HOUR (LucasArts, 1989)
- THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND (LucasArts, 1990)
- ULTIMA VI (Origin Systems, 1990)
- ULTIMA UNDERWORLD (Origin Systems, 1992)
- WING COMMANDER I & II (Origin Systems, 1990-91)
- WOLFENSTEIN 3-D (id Software, 1992)

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PATCHES

Computer game programs have grown so massive and the number of hardware configurations has become so huge that incompatibilities and glitches are frustratingly common.

Software fixes, or "patches," for buggy programs have become a necessary evil until we reach the golden age of standardized platforms and bug-free programs. Red indicates new files.

▶ New Patches are on disk.

These patches can usually be downloaded from the major online networks (CompuServe, GEnie, ZDNet) and *Computer Gaming World*'s Web Site (http://www.zdnet.com/gaming) but can also be obtained from individual software publisher's websites or direct from the publisher with proof of purchase.

This month, we feature patches from many of the winners and finalists from this year's *CGW* Premier Awards.

Anvil of Dawn Update: Fixes various crashes that occur in the game, makes the armor rating work correctly and fixes several graphics problems.

Caesar II Update: Fixes reported problems, including some AI peculiarities.

Civilization 2 V1.06: Fixes AI damaged from earlier patches. Also cleans up multimedia glitches and other annoying bugs.

Crusader: No Remorse Update: Upgrades CNR v1.01 to v1.21. Provides support for the Joystick/Gravis Gamepad, programmable joystick buttons, three levels of game skipping, fixes known bugs and also improves performance on 8MB machines.

Dark Forces Update: Fixes reported bugs.

EF 2000 Midlife Upgrade V2.01: Enhances almost every aspect of the game, including AI, weapons, combat, campaigns and much more.

Fighter Duel Update: Provides several enhancements to the game, including new plane. Note: FD will no longer be modem compatible with the original version with the use of this patch.

Fighter Duel Patch: Includes several new features and also changes some keyboard behavior.

Flight Unlimited Updates: Fixes various bugs and updates Sound Blaster drivers.

Gabriel Knight 2 V1.11: Saves games on Windows 95

Heroes of Might and Magic Update: Provides a map to make the game easier.

NBA Live '96 Update: Latest update with new rosters, including Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson and Charles Barkley.

The Need For Speed Update: Latest version of EA's racing game.

NHL Hockey Update: Fixes numerous technical problems.

Star Trek: TNG: A Final Unity Update: Lets you install the game even if your computer does not appear to meet minimum system requirements. This solves installation problems for NexGen machines since they are detected as 386 machines.

Stonekeep Update: Fixes numerous reported bugs.

Su-27 Flanker V1.05: Replaces the Beta v1.03 patch and upgrades v1.0, v1.01, v1.02 to version 1.05.

The Lost Mind of Dr. Brain Update: Latest version of Sierra's popular puzzle game.

Trophy Bass V1.01: Updates game to V1.01. Fixes known bugs.

Warcraft II Over KALI Update: Improves the performance of Warcraft II when played over KALI. It's neither necessary nor desirable to use this patch when playing over a real IPX network or over a modem.

Wing Commander IV Update: Sets alternative joystick routines and fixes joystick calibration bugs. Use at your own risk.

Publisher Websites

Many of these patches are available directly from the publishers, at the following sites:

Accolade: http://www.accolade.com
Activision: http://www.activision.com
Apogee/3d Realms: http://www.apogee1.com
Bethesda: http://www.bethsoft.com
Blizzard: http://www.blizzard.com/tech.htm
Bullfrog: http://www.ea.com/bullfrog.html
Domark: http://www.domark.com
EA: http://www.ea.com/tech.html
Interactive Magic: http://www.imagicgames.com/games.html
Interplay: http://www.interplay.com
Looking Glass: http://www.vie.com/lgt/utility.html
LucasArts: http://www.lucasarts.com
MicroProse: http://www.microprose.com/mpshules.html
Microsoft: http://www.microsoft.com
Mindscape: http://www.mindscape.com
New World Computing: http://www.nwcomputing.com
Ocean: http://www.ef2000.com
Origin: http://www.ea.com/origin/english/index.html
Papyrus: http://www.sierra.com
Philips: http://spider.media.philips.com/media/games
Sierra On-Line: http://www.sierra.com
Spectrum HoloByte: http://www.trek.microprose.com/shuttles.html
SSI: http://www.cmact.com/ghole/ssi.htm
Virgin: http://www.vie.com/htm/viesupport.html

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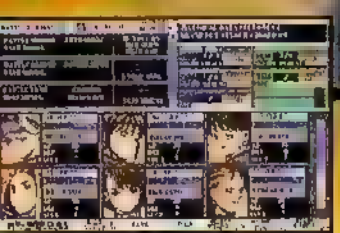

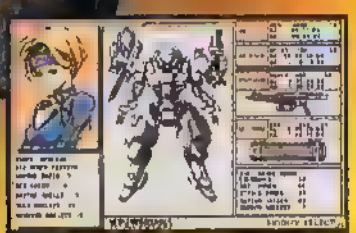

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THE COMPUTER GAMING POLL • A MONTHLY SURVEY OF THE READERS OF COMPUTER GAMING

You've read our take on the latest games, now here's a chance to see what your fellow gamers think. The CG Top 100 is a monthly tally of game ratings provided by our readers via the CG Poll ballot found in each issue. Approximately 50 games are rated each month, and the results are added to the aggregate results from past months. This historical database serves as a terrific reference for what you, the gamers, feel are the best plays in gaming.

TOP ACTION GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Crusader: No Remorse	Origin	9.95
2	DOOM II	id Software	9.77
3	Dark Forces	LucasArts	9.70
4	Virtual Pool	Interplay	9.52
5	Magic Carpet	Electronic Arts	9.48
6	System Shock	Origin	9.19
7	The Need For Speed	Electronic Arts	9.12
8	Heretic	id Software	9.08
9	Hexen	Raven Software	9.04
10	Earthworm Jim	Activision	8.90

TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Gabriel Knight 2	Sierra	10.02
2	Mission Critical	Legend	9.47
3	Full Throttle	LucasArts	9.44
4	Woodruff & Schnibble	Sierra	9.28
5	Relentless	Electronic Arts	9.12
6	Ecstatica	Psygnosis	9.09
7	Under A Killing Moon	Access	9.04
8	Legend of Kyrandia 3	Virgin/Westwood	8.94
9	Riddle of Master Lu	Sanctuary Woods	8.94
10	Shannara	Legend	8.88

TOP CLASSIC/PUZZLE GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	You Don't Know Jack	Berkeley Systems	8.96
2	Monopoly	Virgin/Westwood	8.92
3	Incredible Toons	Dynamix	8.86
4	Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	8.85
5	Clockwerx	Spectrum HoloByte	8.25
6	Hodj n' Podj	Virgin Interactive	8.16
7	Shanghai-Great Moments	Activision	7.75
8	Lemmings Chronicles	Psygnosis	7.47
9	Multimedia Celebrity Poker	New World Computing	7.28
	Bridge Olympiad	GOP	7.28

TOP SIMULATION/SPACE COMBAT GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Wing Commander 3	Origin	10.57
2	TIE Fighter	LucasArts	10.26
3	Wing Commander IV	Origin	10.19
4	MechWarrior 2	Activision	10.05
5	NASCAR Racing	Papyrus	10.01
6	U.S. Marine Fighters	Electronic Arts	9.76
7	U.S. Navy Fighters	Electronic Arts	9.60
8	EF2000	Ocean	9.57
9	Wings of Glory	Origin	9.56
10	Flight Unlimited	Looking Glass	9.51

TOP SPORTS GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	NBA Live 95	EA Sports	9.86
2	NHL Hockey	EA Sports	9.70
3	Front Page Sports Football 95	Sierra	9.64
4	FPS Football Pro 96	Sierra	9.18
5	PGA Tour Golf 486	EA Sports	8.93
6	Front Page Sports Baseball	Dynamix	8.76
7	Hardball IV	Accolade	8.70
8	Hardball 5	Accolade	8.36
9	NFL Pro League	IBM	8.15
10	Tony LaRussa 3	Stormfront Studios	8.12

TOP STRATEGY GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Warcraft II	Blizzard	10.50
2	Command & Conquer	Virgin/Westwood	10.00
3	Jagged Alliance	Sir-Tech	9.81
4	Heroes of Might & Magic	New World Computing	9.77
5	Master of Magic	MicroProse	9.68
6	Warcraft	Blizzard	9.64
7	X-COM: Terror from the Deep	MicroProse	9.38
8	Warlords II Deluxe	SSG	9.27
9	Transport Tycoon	MicroProse	8.94
10	CivNet	MicroProse	8.80

TOP ROLE PLAYING GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Anvil of Dawn	New World Computing	9.16
2	Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen	New World Computing	9.07
3	Ravenloft: Stone Prophet	SSI	8.98
4	Wolf	Sanctuary Woods	8.64
5	Stonekeep	Interplay	8.46
6	Menzoberranzan	SSI	8.26
7	Mordor	TDA	8.00
8	Dark Sun: Wake of the Ravager	SSI	7.64
9	Thunderscape	SSI	7.63
10	Druid	Sir Tech	7.00

TOP WARGAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Panzer General	SSI	10.46
2	Steel Panthers	SSI	10.36
3	Battleground: Gettysburg	Talonsoft	9.76
4	Rise of the West	RAW	9.63
5	Flight Commander 2 Mission Bldr	Avalon Hill	9.48
6	Stalingrad	Avalon Hill	9.38
7	Flight Commander 2	Avalon Hill	9.35
8	Custer's Last Command	Incredible Simulatio	9.12
9	Perfect General II	QQP	8.98
10	Allied General	SSI	8.85

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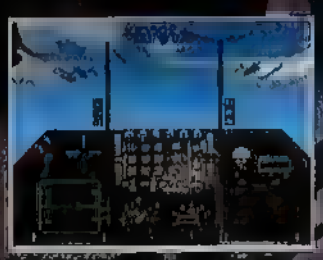

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TOP 100 GAMES

Reader Poll #141

		GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
★	1	Wing Commander 3	Origin	SI	10.57
★	2	Warcraft II	Blizzard	ST	10.50
★	3	Panzer General	SSI	WG	10.46
	4	Steel Panthers	SSI	WG	10.36
	5	TIE Fighter	LucasArts	SI	10.26
	6	Wing Commander IV	Origin	SI	10.10
	7	MechWarrior 2	Activision	SI	10.05
★	8	Gabriel Knight 2	Sierra	AD	10.02
	9	NASCAR Racing	Papyrus	SI	10.01
	10	Command & Conquer	Virgin/Westwood	ST	10.00
★	11	Crusader: No Remorse	Origin	AC	9.95
★	12	NBA Live '95	EA Sports	SP	9.86
	13	Jagged Alliance	Sir Tech	ST	9.81
	14	DOOM II	Id Software	AC	9.77
		Heroes of Might & Magic	New World Computing	ST	9.77
	16	Battleground: Gettysburg	Talonsoft	WG	9.76
		U.S. Marine Fighters	Electronic Arts	SI	9.76
	18	NHL Hockey	EA Sports	SP	9.70
		Dark Forces	LucasArts	AC	9.70
	20	Master of Magic	MicroProse	ST	9.66
	21	Front Page Sports Football 95	Sierra	SP	9.64
		Warcraft	Blizzard	ST	9.64
	23	Rise of the West	RAW	WG	9.63
	24	U.S. Navy Fighters	Electronic Arts	SI	9.60
	25	EF2000	Ocean	SI	9.57
	26	Wings of Glory	Origin	SI	9.56
	27	Virtual Pool	Interplay	AC	9.52
	28	Flight Unlimited	Looking Glass	SI	9.51
	29	Flight Commander 2 Mission Bldr	Avalon Hill	WG	9.48
		Magic Carpet	Electronic Arts	AC	9.48
	31	Mission Critical	Legend	AD	9.47
	32	Full Throttle	LucasArts	AD	9.44
	33	Stalingrad	Avalon Hill	WG	9.38
		X-COM: Terror from the Deep	MicroProse	ST	9.38
		Aces of the Deep	Dynamix	SI	9.38
	36	Flight Commander 2	Avalon Hill	WG	9.35
	37	Woodruff & Schnibble	Sierra	AD	9.28
	38	Warlords II Deluxe	SSG	ST	9.27
	39	System Shock	Origin	AC	9.19
	40	FPS Football Pro 96	Sierra	SP	9.18
★	41	Anvil of Dawn	New World Computing	RP	9.16
	42	Custer's Last Command	Incredible Simulatio	WG	9.12
		The Need For Speed	Electronic Arts	AC	9.12
		Relentless	Electronic Arts	AD	9.12
	45	Ecstatica	Psygnosis	AD	9.09
	46	Heretic	Id Software	AC	9.08
	47	Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen	New World Computing	RP	9.07
	48	Hexen	Raven Software	AC	9.04
		Under A Killing Moon	Access	AD	9.04
	50	Ravenloft: Stone Prophet	SSI	RP	8.98

		GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
★	51	You Don't Know Jack	Berkeley Systems	CP	8.96
		Perfect General II	QQP	WG	8.96
	53	Riddle of Master Lu	Sanctuary Woods	AD	8.94
		Legend of Kyrandia 3	Virgin/Westwood	AD	8.94
		Transport Tycoon	MicroProse	ST	8.94
	56	PGA Tour Golf 486	EA Sports	SP	8.93
	57	Monopoly	Virgin/Westwood	CP	8.92
	58	Earthworm Jim	Activision	AC	8.90
	59	Shannara	Legend	AD	8.88
	60	Descent	Interplay	AC	8.86
		Incredible Toons	Dynamix	CP	8.86
	62	Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	CP	8.85
		Allied General	SSI	WG	8.85
	64	CivNet	MicroProse	ST	8.80
	65	Phantasmagoria	Sierra	AD	8.78
	66	Front Page Sports Baseball	Dynamix	SP	8.76
	67	Star Trek: TNG, Final Unity	Spectrum HoloByte	AD	8.75
	68	1830	Avalon Hill	ST	8.72
	69	Hardball IV	Accolade	SP	8.70
		Warhammer	Mindscape	ST	8.70
	71	Romance of 3 Kingdoms IV	Koei	WG	8.68
	72	Buried In Time	Sanctuary Woods	AD	8.65
	73	Mortal Kombat 3	GT Interactive	AC	8.64
		Wolf	Sanctuary Woods	RP	8.64
		King's Quest VII	Sierra	AD	8.64
		The Dig	LucasArts	AD	8.64
	77	Caesar II	Sierra	ST	8.62
		Future Shock	Bethesda	AC	8.62
		Superheroes of Hoboken	Legend	AD	8.62
	80	1942 Pacific Air War Gold	MicroProse	SI	8.61
	81	Magic Carpet 2	Electronic Arts	AC	8.56
	82	Werewolf vs. Comanche	NovaLogic	SI	8.50
		Death Gate	Legend	AD	8.50
	84	Stonekeep	Interplay	RP	8.46
		FX Fighter	GTE Entertainment	AC	8.46
	86	Apache	Interactive Magic	SI	8.43
		Dark Legions	SSI	AC	8.43
	88	Lords of the Realm	Impressions	ST	8.42
	89	SU-27 Flanker	SSI	SI	8.39
	90	Cyclemania	Accolade	AC	8.37
	91	Hardball 5	Accolade	SP	8.36
	92	Fighter Duel	Philips Media	SI	8.35
	93	Loderunner	Dynamix	ST	8.31
	94	Celtic Tales	Koei	ST	8.28
	95	Bioforge	Origin	AD	8.27
	96	Menzoberranzan	SSI	RP	8.26
	97	Clockwerx	Spectrum HoloByte	CP	8.25
		Panthers in the Shadows	HPS	WG	8.25
		Space Quest 6	Sierra	AD	8.25
	100	Empire II	New World Computing	WG	8.22

Games on unnumbered lines have scores equal to the line above. ★ = Top game of type. Red = New Game. AD = Adventure, RP = Role Playing, SI = Simulation/ Space Combat ST = Strategy, WG = Wargame, AC = Action, SP = Sports, CP = Classic/Puzzle. Games are retired after two years and become eligible for the Hall of Fame.

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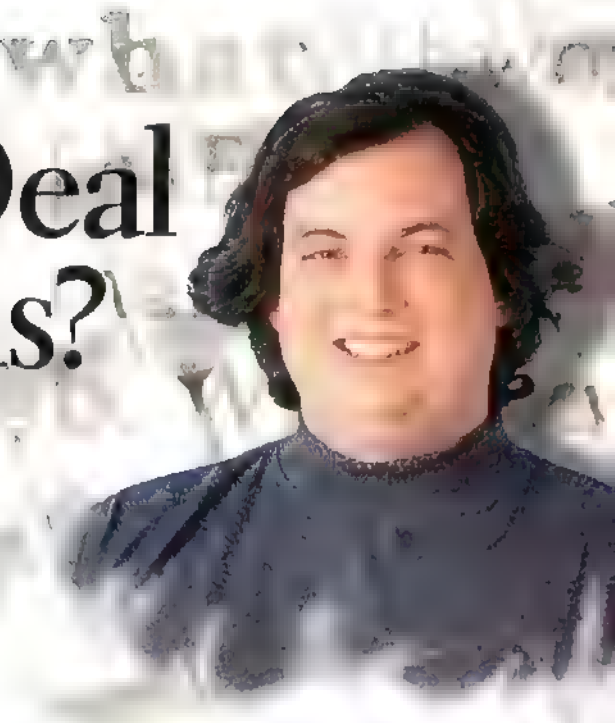
What's The Deal With...Sequels?



Most people would prefer to spend their money on more of what they know they like, rather than risk it on an unknown quantity. It's this foible of human nature that makes the sequel such a powerful marketing force, in movies, in books, and even our beloved computer games. The way I see it, game sequels come in three categories: EVEs (Evolutionary forms); MOTS, (More Of The Same); and FRAMs (Franchise Milkers).

EVEs are the strength of mainstream computer gaming, where the flexibility of programming code allows the expensive breakthrough work done on a game to become part of a "toolbox" to build the sequel. Games like Civ2, COMMAND & CONQUER or the WING COMMANDER series offer greater depth and complexity while keeping the qualities that made the predecessor a classic. Each successful installment allows designers more money and freedom for the next incarnation, this is never a bad thing. Some EVEs, though, are so radical that they scarcely resemble the original game, and are more the designer's attempt to "Get it right," as in the latest installment of UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS.

I'm more ambivalent about the MOTS: games like DOOM 2 or X COM 2–quick follow-ups to immensely popular games that cash in on success and give gamers more of what they are screaming for. Yes, I enjoyed the previously mentioned games, but I can't deny that there was a real strong "been there, done that" feel to the proceedings. This might have been reduced had the price tag been smaller—say, in an "Expansion Disk" format—where the company was honest and said, "The designers have nothing new to say right now. But if you're hungry for more, here's some more levels at a discount to tide you over until we're ready to really blow you away again." Expansions like GHOST BEAR LEGACY for MECHWARRIOR 2, or COVERT OPS for COMMAND & CONQUER, are perfect examples of how companies can quickly cash in on the public's high demand for a game without soaking us for the full price of a "new" game.

A deeper problem with MOTS is how dangerous they can be to a series. Often, designers are so desperate to cater to us quickly that they forget what the audience is really after. Those of us with long enough memories may recall the disastrous "original" sequel to DUNGEON MASTER, back in the Amiga/Atari ST days. It was a case of picking the wrong "same" to make more of—when "more challenging" translates to "tedious and inane," a popular franchise can spoil pretty fast.

One could argue that FRAMs are a subset of MOTS, but these endless, unnecessary sports sequels really get on my nerves! Do we really need a new HARDBALL game every few weeks? The last evolution in the series that really couldn't have been covered with a cheap expansion disk was the jump from HARDBALL 2 to 3. They are up to 5 now, with no visible improvements other than getting prettier.

> "Gamers should only pay full price when there is a whole new game–unfortunately, software companies rarely agree."

Even solid games like FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL are falling prey to publishing entire "new" versions year after year. Yes, I realize that the series has won *CGW*'s Best Sports Game award for the last three years running, and with good reason; but come on, it's pretty much the same game every bloody year! Here's an idea for you profit-crazed kids at Sierra: give it a rest, put out an expansion disk with the '96/'97 roster and a few tweaks on it for $30, and then spend a year creating a sequel that actually justifies its own existence! Wouldn't everybody be happier to hear a consumer 20 months down the line saying, "Yeah, I really liked FPS: FOOTBALL '96 but '98 blows it completely away!" instead of "What a gyp! I just paid $60 for a game I already have!"

Of course, the only reason FRAMs and MOTS exist is that they get bought in droves, and expansion disks don't have the same profit curve. Companies that re-invest in creating evolutionary sequels to their winning designs aren't doing that much better than the ones who churn out the same old thing, and until they do, I imagine things will keep going along they way they have been.

Still, cookie-cutter software bugs me...even when it's a cookie flavor I like.

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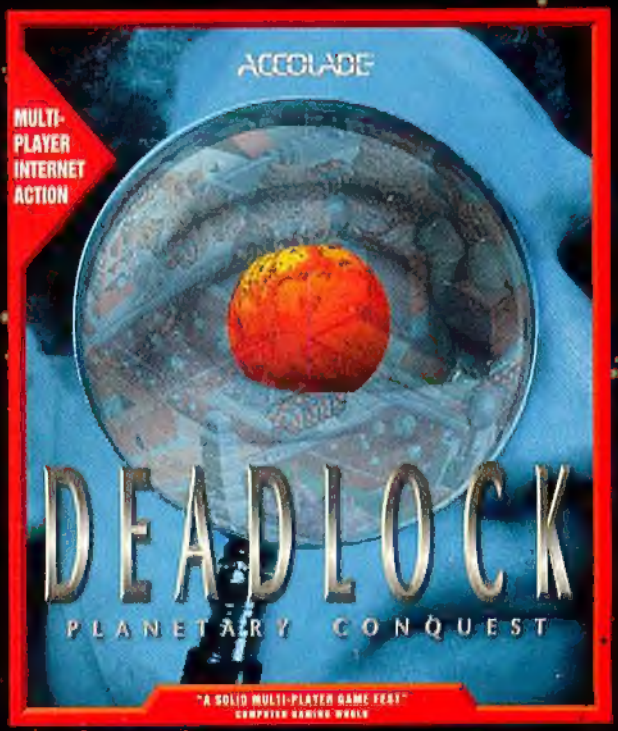

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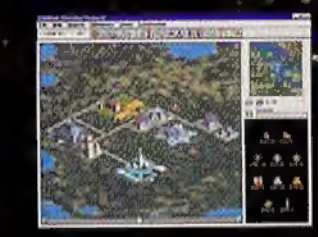

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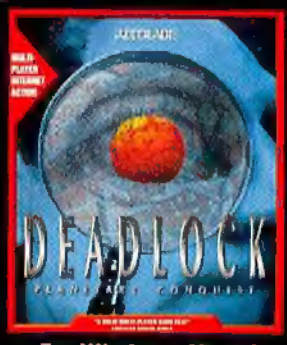

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